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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 26 June 2024

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

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions. The first portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture, and parliamentary business. I remind members who wish to ask a supplementary question to press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question.

Scotland's Constitutional Future (Engagement with Third Sector)

1. **Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, as part of its work to further the case for Scottish independence, what recent engagement it has had with third sector organisations regarding Scotland's constitutional future. (S6O-03621)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): As part of our work to provide the people of Scotland with the information that they need to make an informed choice about their future, Scottish Government ministers and officials have met a range of third sector organisations throughout the course of the publication of the "Building a New Scotland" series. We will continue to engage with the people of Scotland and our civic organisations positively and respectfully to set out the case for an independent Scotland in the European Union, and how that could make Scotland a wealthier and fairer place for all who live here.

Bill Kidd: Due to the cost of living crisis that was induced by the UK Government, we are seeing an increasing reliance on third sector services. Can the cabinet secretary provide his assessment of the impact of 14 years of Tory austerity on the third sector, and say how an independent Scotland could better support those important organisations?

Angus Robertson: The Scottish Government appreciates the work of the third sector, which often provides lifeline services to our most vulnerable communities during the current cost of living crisis. Recent research by the Scottish

Council for Voluntary Organisations demonstrates that more organisations are feeling the impact of rising costs, inflation and other financial pressures, which is in turn impacting on their ability to deliver their vital services. An independent Scotland in the European Union would create opportunities for a fairer and wealthier country away from the Brexit-based economic model of low growth and high inequality.

Edinburgh International Book Festival (Viability)

2. **Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Edinburgh International Book Festival, in light of reports that the Fossil Free Books campaign has threatened its viability. (S6O-03622)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government has ongoing dialogue with all our major arts festivals, including the Edinburgh International Book Festival. The decision to withdraw from corporate sponsorship is a matter for the festival itself. However, as I have stated publicly on a number of occasions, sponsorship plays a crucial role in supporting culture in Scotland. We are committed to working with sponsors and sector organisations, including the Edinburgh International Book Festival, to help to maintain those valuable relationships.

Sue Webber: As the cabinet secretary knows, Scotland is host to world famous events, including the international book festival and the Edinburgh fringe festival. However, because of the Fossil Free Books campaign, literary festivals across the country now have huge holes in their budgets. Last week, the First Minister highlighted the damage that disinvestment campaigns are doing to the arts sector and I know that he has spoken with Baillie Gifford to offer reassurance about the role that those campaigns play in the economy and culture sector.

Other than financial help, what specific support might the cabinet secretary be looking to offer to the book festival and the fringe festival to give them the security that they need, so that they will not feel the pressures of some of those campaigns?

Angus Robertson: The issue of disinvestment and the risk of contagion—there is a real risk that, in addition to Baillie Gifford, other sponsors will feel that they are under pressure to consider or reconsider their existing arrangements—are detrimental to the cultural and arts sector. It behoves us all to explore ways in which we can safeguard and protect the private sector in philanthropic giving. We are working closely with the festivals and others to explore that. We are

also working with Governments elsewhere in the United Kingdom, because the difficulty that Edinburgh International Book Festival is facing is being felt by book festival organisers elsewhere in the UK, including in Wales and England, and I believe that a four-nations meeting will be held with representatives from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport tomorrow.

I do not think that there is a simple solution, but we are open-minded. If the member and her colleagues, or members from across the chamber, have any ideas, I would be very open to hearing them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A couple of members want to ask supplementaries. I will take both of them, but they will need to be brief, as will the responses.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Last week, I asked the First Minister whether he would convene an urgent meeting to ensure on-going sponsorship of the arts and culture sector. He said that he would consider it. For months, I have been calling for an urgent summit to discuss funding for festivals, many of which are due to take place this summer. This is the last opportunity before recess for the Government to put its intentions on the record. I ask the cabinet secretary to give reassurances and to update the chamber on whether he, the First Minister or, indeed, the Deputy First Minister intends to take up our proposal and hold an urgent summit on festivals in Scotland.

Angus Robertson: I have given reassurance to Neil Bibby on that issue a number of times. We regularly meet the arts sector, including the festivals—I venture to say that we do so on a weekly basis. However we want to badge them, I assure him that such meetings are taking place, and that issues such as disinvestment and sponsorship are matters of very high priority for me and for my officials.

Obviously, as the MSP for Edinburgh Central, I am recused from day-to-day decision making in relation to this question, but, in general terms, the issue is one of very high priority. Meetings are being conducted with the Edinburgh festivals and with others to make sure that the challenge is being confronted head on.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Baillie Gifford holds billions of pounds' worth of investments in fossil fuel industries and in companies with links to Israel's occupation and its genocide of Palestinians. Fossil Free Books is a collective of more than 800 book workers, including authors and illustrators, whose campaign seeks to persuade Baillie Gifford to divest from those destructive companies. Members will recall

how Baillie Gifford divested from Russian firms in 2022, in response to political pressure.

Will the cabinet secretary join me in recognising the work of Fossil Free Books and applauding it in its aim of highlighting how cultural events and institutions are used to launder corporate reputations? Does he share its vision?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was not a brief question.

Angus Robertson: As the member does, I have concerns about climate change, and I have very severe concerns about what has been happening to Israeli hostages and to the people of Gaza. However, I do not think that disinvestment from cultural events such as the Edinburgh international book festival furthers those aims. It should be the aim of everybody involved that we have ethical support, ethical philanthropy and ethical giving. I know that Baillie Gifford is committed to that, and I know that the festivals are committed to it. We need to find a way of giving assurance to people who are concerned about issues such as climate change and the situation in Gaza, but we need to do that in a way that does not fundamentally undermine our arts and culture sector.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A number of colleagues want to ask supplementaries to question 3, but they will need to be brief, as will the responses.

Glasgow Citizens Theatre (Redevelopment)

3. **Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Glasgow's Citizens Theatre about the future of its redevelopment project. (S6O-03623)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government has been in regular discussion with Glasgow's Citizens Theatre regarding the future of the redevelopment project and the significant challenges that it is facing. We have invested £6 million in the redevelopment, in recognition of the importance of the Citizens Theatre as one of Scotland's leading cultural institutions both locally, through its community engagement in Glasgow, and internationally. Sadly, since it got under way, the project has been hit by an unprecedented combination of events, from Brexit to the pandemic to high inflation costs, following the war in Ukraine, which has led to soaring costs.

Annie Wells: The redevelopment of Glasgow's Citizens Theatre is expected to act as a regeneration boost to the Gorbals area, and I welcome Glasgow City Council's announcement of its commitment to provide additional funding, but that will not be enough to enable the project to be

completed. In addition, it has been reported that the council will not release its share of the funding until the other money has been secured. If the project collapses, its benefits will be lost to the local community. What discussions has the Scottish Government had with Glasgow City Council about its continued support for the project?

Angus Robertson: I thank Annie Wells for her timely question. Only yesterday, there was a meeting of funders that are involved in the project. I assure her that the people who sat around that table are extremely committed to Glasgow's Citizens Theatre. On the other hand, we all need to be aware and have an understanding of the scale of the financial challenge that is faced.

The Scottish Government has sought clarification on the shortfall that exists. I know that there has been an issue to do with accessing levelling up funding during the election period. Everybody is very invested in trying to find a solution, but I put on the record our recognition of the seriousness of the challenge that is faced by the Citizens Theatre and of the fact that a significant financial gap remains.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I understand that rising construction material costs have significantly delayed the redevelopment of the Citizens Theatre. Will the cabinet secretary provide his assessment of the impact of the cost of living crisis on our culture and arts sector and particularly on the infrastructure and maintenance of art spaces, such as through the Citizens Theatre redevelopment project?

Angus Robertson: The cost of living crisis has had a significant impact on the culture sector, specifically on infrastructure and maintenance, with increased costs being compounded by disrupted supply chains. We are having to work within the most challenging budget that has been delivered under devolution. The situation is particularly acute in our capital budget, with the block grant for capital funding expected to reduce by 8.7 per cent in real terms between 2023-24 and 2027-28. That will be a cumulative loss of more than £1.3 billion, based on the latest forecast after the spring statement.

The scale of the challenge should be obvious to everybody. That does not mean that we will not try to be as supportive as we can be, but the level of constraint needs to be better understood.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The risk to the Citizens Theatre is real, with the company under imminent threat of liquidation. On that basis, will the Scottish Government actively participate in the steering group that consists of representatives of Glasgow City Council, the Citizens Theatre and the contractor, Kier? There is a major discrepancy

between the estimated cost of the project according to the theatre's consultants and the estimated cost according to the prime contractor. As the Scottish Government—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary.

Angus Robertson: I acknowledge Paul Sweeney's sincere interest in the matter, which is a concern for members across Glasgow. The Scottish Government was involved in discussions that were held yesterday on funding for the Glasgow Citizens Theatre. If we can participate in other fora in order to secure a solution to the funding challenges, I am open to those, and I am happy to discuss the matter further with Paul Sweeney.

Creative Scotland (Meetings)

4. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met with Creative Scotland. (S6O-03624)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): As part of normal management relations with directly funded public bodies, Scottish Government officials regularly meet Creative Scotland, with the latest meeting having taken place on 18 June. I last met Creative Scotland on 22 May, and my next meeting is scheduled for next Monday.

Sarah Boyack: At that meeting, will the cabinet secretary be able to promise to add to Creative Scotland's budget any of the additional £100 million that was promised by the First Minister, given the arts industry's fears that the funding environment is extremely precarious, which could lead to devastating decisions for arts groups unless there is enough money when Creative Scotland makes its funding decisions in October?

Angus Robertson: Sarah Boyack is aware of the normal Scottish Government funding procedures that take place in the Parliament. The Government has already committed to a £15.8 million uplift in this financial year and to providing an additional £25 million next year. Discussions with Creative Scotland and the rest of the sector about additional financial support will continue.

I would be delighted to have the support of other political parties for the £100 million uplift in culture funding. That stands in contrast with the decline in funding in England under the United Kingdom Conservative Party and the cut to funding for culture and the arts in Wales by the Labour Party.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): At his meeting with Creative Scotland next Monday, could the cabinet secretary raise the issue of funding for projects for people with disabilities?

There is still concern in the disability community that the appropriate methodology is not being used. Will he report back to the Parliament on his conversations with Creative Scotland on that issue?

Angus Robertson: I am happy to give Mr Balfour that undertaking. The timing of his question is very good—if he wishes to get in touch with me before Monday, I will be happy to raise that issue. I am aware that services that are provided by the likes of Euan's Guide are very helpful for people with disabilities in allowing them to better understand which facilities are accessible. I give Mr Balfour a commitment that, if he gets in touch with me before Monday, I will raise the issue that he has raised in the Parliament today.

Arts Sector (Talent Retention)

5. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it prevents a loss of talent when considering any reduction in funding to the arts sector. (S6O-03625)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government is not considering any reduction in funding to the arts sector. The First Minister has reaffirmed the commitment to growing investment in culture and screen by £100 million over the coming years. We want to ensure that people who are motivated to realise their aspirations of a career in the creative sector are supported to do so. A wide range of support is already in place and being delivered by our agencies, including Creative Scotland, Screen Scotland and the enterprise agencies.

Graham Simpson: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but I wonder what he would say to the director of Culture Counts, Lori Anderson, who wrote to the First Minister:

“Large-scale contraction will have a systemic effect that can't be predicted or easily undone. Our artists, performers and freelancers are vulnerable, and some are choosing to leave the sector seeking more stability. Our reputation and ambitions as an international cultural leader are now at serious risk.”

What is his response to that?

Angus Robertson: I have regular discussions with Culture Counts and other cultural organisations about plans to increase funding for culture in Scotland. There are areas of the sector that should be hugely exciting for young people who want to begin a career in the arts. I point the member to the boom in the screen sector, which we are very supportive of.

I give him the commitment that we have no plans to reduce culture spending. We are planning

to increase culture spending, and we are doing so; that is in contrast to the Conservative Party, which is cutting it in England.

Citizens Assemblies (Rural Scotland)

6. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how citizens assemblies can help to ensure that the views of people in rural communities are taken into account in decision-making on matters of importance to rural Scotland. (S6O-03626)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Jamie Hepburn): We want public participation in our democracy and we want people to be involved in the issues that they care about and the decisions that affect them. Citizens assemblies are one method of achieving that, as there are many instances when involving people in an important decision is better approached differently.

For example, we fund Scottish Rural Action to deliver the Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament. That democratic assembly takes place every second year and ensures that rural voices are heard in policy making. The most recent event was held in Fort William last November and attracted more than 500 participants from across rural and islands Scotland.

Emma Harper: I have been contacted by constituents and organisations across rural Dumfries and Galloway who are concerned about decisions that are made about their communities, particularly in relation to energy and infrastructure projects and delivery of rural healthcare. Can the minister comment on how the Scottish Government listens to rural areas on such matters more generally, and can he provide assurance that the views of people in the south-west of Scotland are treated with equity with those of people in urban areas?

Jamie Hepburn: I can certainly give that assurance and, more generally, assurance on the importance of listening to the voice of rural Scotland, which is important to me. I represent a largely urban constituency, but it contains rural communities, so the issue is as important to me, as a constituency representative, as it is to me as a minister, and it is important for the Government.

I referred to the work of the Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament: Scotland is the only jurisdiction in the United Kingdom with a rural Parliament. With regard to the part of Scotland that Ms Harper asked about, last summer we held, in Newton Stewart in Dumfries and Galloway, a community workshop that was focused on the land use and agriculture just transition plan. We also continue to support rural communities in Dumfries and Galloway through our community-led local development funding programme.

Humanitarian Aid (Gaza)

7. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in relation to its humanitarian aid funding, what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the distribution of humanitarian aid to Gaza, in light of recent developments including Ireland's, Spain's and Norway's recognition of the state of Palestine. (S6O-03627)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): We have continued to urge the United Kingdom Government since October 2023 to use its influence to ensure that the barriers to aid getting into and distributed throughout Gaza, which are in contravention of international humanitarian law, are removed.

We have also called for the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine, end the licensing of arms exports to Israel and reinstate funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. It is now critical that all parties step up their efforts to agree to the ceasefire deal that has been tabled by the United States, so that the unimaginable suffering that is being caused by the conflict can finally end.

Kevin Stewart: Will the cabinet secretary outline whether he shares the view that distribution of humanitarian aid to Gaza would be easier if Palestine was recognised by all of the international community as an independent state?

The cabinet secretary has given us a flavour of the asks that he has already made of the UK Government. Can he outline what the Scottish Government's will ask of the new UK Government in relation to Gaza and Palestine?

Angus Robertson: The distribution of humanitarian aid to Gaza could be more efficient and effective if Palestine were universally recognised as an independent state, because that would facilitate more robust diplomatic relations and establish clear legal frameworks for the operation of international agencies. It could also provide a Palestinian state with more control over its borders and open the door for direct development aid and investment from other countries.

We will continue to push the next UK Government to use its influence to bring about an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages and unfettered access for humanitarian aid going into Gaza.

International Development Fund (Malawi Emergency Medical Projects)

8. Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will

provide an update regarding the status of its international development fund and its funding for emergency medical projects in Malawi. (S6O-03628)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): We have worked closely with our partner-country Governments on the design of new health, education and equalities programmes, with stakeholders kept informed throughout the process.

Our new health programme has been closely aligned to national priorities and it has been informed by our extensive research and elements that are already launched. That includes live competitive grant-funding rounds for Zambia and Rwanda, and will also include a health partnership programme that will support national health service staff partnerships with our partner countries Malawi, Zambia and Rwanda in sectors including emergency medicine.

Michael Marra: In 2010, with support from the Scottish Government's international development fund, a team of Scots—including medics from NHS Tayside—helped to set up the first dedicated adult and emergency centre at Queen Elizabeth central hospital in Blantyre, Malawi.

The work of the Scottish emergency medicine Malawi project was described to me as "the exemplar of emergency care in Malawi."

It was delivered under budget and was a great success. It was agreed that that Scottish Government funding be paused, at the start of the pandemic. Yesterday—I believe as a result of this question—project leaders were finally told that the funding will not be reinstated. The funding backed a promise to some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world—it was a moral commitment. The loss will be measured in lives. No reasons have been given. It is, in the words of the dedicated doctors, "an utter travesty." For what reasons did the cabinet secretary approve the cancellation?

Angus Robertson: I think that Mr Marra has received letters about that case in the past.

On the question that was asked of me, the Scottish Government will support better health outcomes in Malawi, Zambia and Rwanda through three core portfolio strands. First, there will be a health partnership programme, which will be a platform to facilitate partnership working between Scotland and our partner countries to respond to existing and emerging health challenges.

Secondly, there will be a multilevel programme on non-communicable diseases through a funding partnership with the World Health Organization; a new competitive project for Zambia and Rwanda;

and a new multipartner health service joint fund, at the request of the Malawi Government.

We also have our long-standing relationship with, and investment in, the Kamuzu University of Health Sciences in Malawi and its current partner, the University of Glasgow.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The strong relationship between Malawi and Scotland is more important than ever. Can the minister provide an assessment of how Malawi will benefit from the Scottish Government's recent investment in the World Bank's foundational learning compact inclusive education policy academy?

Angus Robertson: It is estimated that around 15 per cent of children in Malawi are disabled. According to recent estimates half of those children are out of school. Those children need support, which is why the Scottish Government is committed to supporting inclusive education across our partner countries.

As part of our support this year, we launched the World Bank's foundational learning compact inclusive education policy academy. The project is supporting Malawi's Ministry of Education and its Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare, as well as representatives from organisations of persons with disabilities, in making better policy to provide access to education for those who need it most.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Following Covid and the world's worst cholera epidemic in 20 years, the emergency medical service in Malawi requires—now more than ever—that robust and resilient emergency systems be in place. What action can be taken to ensure that the funding that was awarded in the past can be replicated?

Angus Robertson: As I outlined to Mr Marra, three core portfolio strands relate to the question that was put. I am happy to write to Alexander Stewart with more details about all of them. Further funding announcements will be made during the course of this year in relation to the issues that Alexander Stewart has raised.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on constitutional affairs.

Justice and Home Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is portfolio questions on justice and home affairs. Again, any member who wishes to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. There is quite a bit of interest in supplementaries, so they will need to be brief, as, indeed, will the responses.

Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme

1. **Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the potential impact on the emergency services mobile communications programme of the roll-out of BT's Digital Voice to rural and island areas in Scotland, in particular in relation to areas without adequate mobile phone provision. (S6O-03629)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Telecommunications, including the security and resilience of networks, is reserved to the UK Government. The Scottish Government is working closely with the UK Government, Ofcom and the telecoms industry to ensure that risks that are identified by our rural and island communities are resolved ahead of the introduction of the new digital services.

Although the telecoms industry has made the decision to replace the traditional land-line telephone service with a digital service by the start of 2027, there will be no change to the statutory responsibilities that apply to telecommunications providers. The roll-out of the emergency services mobile communications programme and the introduction of the emergency services network will not be impacted by the introduction of new digital services such as BT's Digital Voice, as those digital services do not rely on the mobile network.

Ariane Burgess: Constituents on Skye have been in touch to raise their concerns about emergency services communication during power cuts once Digital Voice is rolled out. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the ESMCP will ensure that emergency services can communicate with one another as well as with residents where there is no analogue land-line and patchy mobile coverage?

Angela Constance: I very much appreciate the question that Ms Burgess has posed, because that point is of fundamental importance. Although the programme is a UK-led one by the Home Office, the Scottish Government contributes to it, of course, and we will continue to engage closely with the UK Government on it.

We have been keen to see the milestones for the programme. There are many advantages of the programme for the emergency services but, as I said in my original answer—I can write to Ariane Burgess in more detail—there are statutory obligations on telecoms providers, particularly in relation to power outages. There is a bit of a technical issue in and around the migration, and those in the sector have particular obligations in

and around any transition. There are separate programmes in place, but I reassure Ariane Burgess that we will work with partners to ensure that the issues of power outages and the impact on those statutory responsibilities that have to remain in place are covered.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. I am going to need shorter responses.

Prisons (Illicit Material) (Use of Drones)

2. **Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the use of drones to fly illicit material into Scottish prisons. (S6O-03630)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The Scottish Prison Service and the Scottish Government are fully aware of the negative impact of drones being used to introduce illicit items into our prison estate, and we understand the threat that that has for the operational stability of our prisons.

A technological response to support the identification of drones within SPS airspace is currently being piloted. That should provide vital evidence to support wider use of that technology throughout the rest of the prison estate. The health and wellbeing of those who live and work in prisons remains a priority for the Government.

Craig Hoy: It is quite clear that not enough is being done. Through a freedom of information request, I have obtained information that reveals that, between January and May, there were 22 cases of drones being intercepted at Edinburgh prison and Barlinnie prison, with seven being intercepted at HMP Edinburgh in January alone. Those devices drop drugs, weapons and cash into the hands of some of Scotland's most notorious prisoners. In a week in which ministers are opening the doors to release violent offenders, does the sharp rise in smuggling by drones not confirm that the Government is asleep at the wheel when it comes to the security of Scotland's prisons?

Angela Constance: Craig Hoy would not have needed to have put in a freedom of information request if he had asked the Government about his concerns about the issue, because that is no secret. I will give him further information. Between January 2023 and December 2023, there were 67 sightings or recoveries of drones across the prison estate.

Craig Hoy may also be interested to know that we received no contact from the United Kingdom Government when it introduced its measures to England and Wales only. Aviation and airspace are reserved. I will pick that up with the new UK Government, because I would have been very

interested in those measures on aviation and airspace.

Nonetheless, the Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Act 2021 gives increased enforcement capability to the police. It also provides for prison officers to retrieve equipment and gives police officers stop-and-search powers when they believe that they are detecting the use of unmanned aircraft in the commission of offences.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will need briefer responses. Stuart McMillan has a brief supplementary question.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Substance use has long been a concern in relation to the health and wellbeing of people in Scotland's prisons, and it remains one of the most prominent challenges to Scotland's prison system. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on the Scottish Government's continued work with partners to support the needs of people who use drugs in prisons?

Angela Constance: During my visits across the Scottish Prison Service estate, I have seen first hand a strong and committed recovery agenda in our prisons. It is clear that the on-going collaborative work with partners such as the Scottish Recovery Consortium, Sustainable Interventions Supporting Change Outside—SISCO—and the Scottish Drugs Forum has a positive and profound effect on individuals throughout their recovery journey while they are in the care of the Scottish Prison Service.

“HMICS Strategic review of the Scottish Police Authority”

3. **Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland's “HMICS Strategic review of the Scottish Police Authority”, which was published earlier this month and sets out the progress made by the Scottish Police Authority in providing oversight and scrutiny of policing in Scotland. (S6O-03631)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The HMICS report highlighted the considerable progress that has been made by the Scottish Police Authority in its role of providing oversight and scrutiny of policing. In particular, the report notes that improved leadership and direction at the SPA has greatly enhanced its work. Chief Inspector Craig Naylor stated that the SPA has

“clearly demonstrated a significant difference in the approach and effectiveness of the SPA as a corporate body since”

the 2019 inspection.

I am grateful to the current SPA leadership, which has guided the organisation to that positive position, and I will continue to support it as it goes further to address the report.

Gordon MacDonald: What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that the SPA continues to fulfil its role in the scrutiny of Scottish policing?

Angela Constance: It is for the SPA to action the issues that have been raised by HMICS. Nonetheless, the Scottish Government will support the SPA to do so. There was one recommendation, and the areas for further development include self-evaluation, leadership, performance and outcome measures, streamlining plans and reporting.

The Scottish Government will continue to support the SPA, particularly as it carries out its vital role in holding the chief constable to account. I meet the SPA and its chief executive regularly.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Contrary to the Scottish National Party's spin that we have just heard, the HMICS report is not all positive. It reveals that Police Scotland currently reports 17 strategic risks, 11 of which are at the most serious red status. However, the inspector identified a failure to take responsibility and no timescales to fix those, and added that the SPA must "demonstrate much stronger governance". Specifically, what discussions has the cabinet secretary had with the SPA about tackling those strategic risks?

Angela Constance: As I said in my earlier answer, I meet the SPA and other policing partners very regularly. I refute the allegation that this matter has anything to do with SNP spin. Chief Inspector Craig Naylor said:

"There have been real improvements in leadership, governance and accountability—the core statutory role of the Authority. Planning, capacity and capability have all been improved. These improvements have also been acknowledged by external auditors."

Early Release of Prisoners (Notification)

4. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to its decision to grant early release to prisoners currently in custody, whether all victims and their families will be duly notified of the early release of any prisoner. (S6O-03632)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I want to ensure that victims are able to access information about the release of the prisoner in their case if they want to receive it. It is important to bear in mind

that providing unwanted or unrequested information can retraumatise victims.

Victims who are already registered with either of the two statutory information schemes will automatically be informed of the release of the prisoner in their case. In cases of emergency release, we have added two further ways of receiving information. Victims can go through one of four named victim support organisations, which can request information about a prisoner's release on their behalf; alternatively, a victim can contact the Scottish Prison Service directly to receive information about the release date of the prisoner in their case.

Jamie Greene: I am not convinced that enough has been done to communicate that information to victims. In fact, Victim Support Scotland warned us that this early release will simply create more victims. Sadly, on day 1 of the first tranche of hundreds of prisoners being released, victims are already being created. This morning, I read in the media a horrendous report that victims are being contacted by prisoners—from inside prison, before their release. Can we check whether that is true—and what is being done about it?

If anyone is caught contacting a victim before their early release, will that release be blocked—vetoed—using the prison governor's veto powers? In addition, if someone is released under the early release programme, then harasses a victim, will they face an immediate recall to prison?

Angela Constance: When I spoke to the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service about an hour ago, she had not been made aware of any specifics other than what she had read in the media. Nonetheless, she will proactively contact victim support organisations, as members would expect.

From my perspective, whether prisoners get early release or planned release, the behaviour that Jamie Greene has outlined is utterly unacceptable. If any victim experiences that, they should immediately contact the Prison Service and the police so that it can be looked into.

In addition, phone numbers for prisoners have to be scrutinised as part of core procedures, in that the phone numbers of people who receive calls should be on an approved list.

The governor veto provides an additional safeguard, because governors can use it to prevent harm to an individual or group of individuals who are at risk.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Not only do the responses need to be briefer, but piling multiple questions within a question does not help. There are two brief supplementary questions.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): The cabinet secretary mentioned that, over and above the existing victim notification scheme, there are additional ways for victims to find out whether someone has been released through emergency release. For the record, will she briefly outline what those are?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, cabinet secretary.

Angela Constance: I will do so briefly.

Following representations that were made to me by victim support organisations, amendments were made to the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill so that victim organisations could be named in the regulations relating to emergency release. Victims can get the support of victim support organisations, who can receive information on their behalf if victims so wish.

Under the other scheme, people can contact the Scottish Prison Service directly.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): SISCO has described the current releases as “shambolic”, with prisoner release services being “overwhelmed”. Last month, the cabinet secretary said that there would be improvements to victim notification, and she may have outlined what those are. However, we know that most victims will not be notified that an offender will be released earlier than expected. Can the cabinet secretary confirm the exact number of offenders who are being released, and the number of victims who will receive notification? If she does not have the number of victims, will she obtain it and share it in the chamber?

Angela Constance: The current projection is that 514 prisoners will be released over the four tranches. The first tranche of 110 will be released today and tomorrow. The number of inquiries regarding the victim notification scheme remains low, at 12. Nonetheless, we continue to engage extensively with community partners and victim support organisations.

Reporting of Sexual Crimes

5. Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to make the process of reporting sexual crimes easier on survivors of these crimes. (S6O-03633)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): We all want complainers to have the confidence to report sexual crimes and we are committed to improving the justice system to better respond to victims’ needs.

Police Scotland has made significant improvements in its approach to tackling violence

against women and girls and has an on-going commitment to improve its organisational culture, with zero tolerance for any form of sexism, misogyny or discrimination.

In addition, the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill aims to improve complainers’ experiences, with a particular focus on ensuring that complainers in sexual offence cases have confidence in the justice system.

We also recognise the important role that front-line services play in helping survivors to come forward. Through the equally safe fund, we have invested £19 million to support 123 organisations.

Emma Roddick: Could the cabinet secretary speak to the engagement that has been going on with justice partners to understand and respond to the potential impact of the Lord Advocate’s recent references regarding a victim’s distress or a statement made shortly after an alleged crime being used as corroboration and, more generally, to how corroboration presenting an unfairly high bar for sexual crimes is being looked at?

Angela Constance: I take seriously the concerns that some stakeholders have with how the corroboration rule can affect access to justice for survivors of crimes that are committed in private.

I was interested to see the Court of Appeal’s judgment in October 2023, and I note that the Lord Advocate commented that the decision

“will improve access to justice for ... victims”

and

“has the potential to transform”

the way that the Crown Office prosecutes all offences, particularly sexual offences.

The Lord Advocate’s further references are currently being considered by the Court of Appeal, and it would not be appropriate for me to provide a view on issues that are live before our independent courts.

Those are recent and on-going developments, so it is not yet possible to model their potential impact.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sharon Dowe has a brief supplementary question.

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): During stage 1 of the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill, one survivor told us that the Crown Office treated them like a witness in their own case. Another survivor told us that their case was just short of four years long, while others spoke of their difficulties in getting information about their cases.

What will the cabinet secretary do to reduce trial delays and improve the standard of communication, to ensure that victims are not discouraged from reporting sexual crimes?

Angela Constance: It is imperative that victims and witnesses are, first and foremost, treated as people and not as pieces of evidence. That end-to-end journey time is being more closely monitored, with the publication of data for full transparency, and the investment in the court recovery programme is paying dividends.

In due course, we will respond to the independent review of the victim notification scheme. The core of that is how and when we communicate with victims. An important strand of work on that has been undertaken by the victims task force, which the Lord Advocate and I chair.

Hate Crime Strategy (Online Radicalisation)

6. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government, as part of the delivery of its hate crime strategy, what action it is taking to tackle online extreme right-wing radicalisation. (S6O-03634)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): Our hate crime strategy delivery plan, which has been informed by people with lived experience of hate crime, is focused on building communities that are cohesive and alert to extreme right-wing divisive narratives, both online and offline, supporting its victims and improving the data to understand hate crime.

The ways in which people can be radicalised are continuously evolving, and we recognise that there is no single pathway or set of factors. That is why we must remain alert and flexible, and ensure that our wider efforts across multiple policy areas build inclusive communities that are resistant to radicalisation and equipped to challenge extremist narratives.

Patrick Harvie: The far right is a growing threat across many European countries. It is in government in countries such as Italy and the Netherlands, and it is on the rise in France and Germany. In the United Kingdom, some Conservatives are now openly debating a merger with the far right after the current election.

Does the Scottish Government share the concern about the threat that is posed not only by extremist far-right rhetoric but by the homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, racism and anti-migrant rhetoric that comes with it, which is now a core part of the business model of a number of social media platforms? What is the Government's view on the role of regulation of those social media platforms?

Siobhian Brown: The Scottish Government takes the threat of extremism very seriously and will continue to work with partners to ensure that we can identify and tackle it effectively. We share the concerns that Mr Harvie raised regarding right-wing extremism globally.

On the point about online behaviour, hate crime is hugely damaging and corrosive to families and communities. Our Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 covers online and offline hate crime, and the UK Government plays a role in the reserved matter of the Online Safety Act 2023, which provides protections for children and adults online.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Will the minister please tell us whether there is a need for the hate crime strategy to be updated now, given the recently published 2023-24 hate crime statistics?

Siobhian Brown: The hate crime strategy was published in March 2023, followed in November by the delivery plan, which sets out our immediate actions over the next two years to implement the strategy.

Recent statistics are a reminder to redouble our efforts to tackle hate and to confront prejudice wherever it occurs. Our strategy remains relevant, and one of our key aims is to seek to improve the availability of data in order to more fully understand the nature, characteristics and extent of hate crime in Scotland, and to use it to inform future policy development.

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): During the most recent meeting of the cross-party group on challenging racial and religious prejudice, the Minister for Victims and Community Safety stated that the Scottish Government was looking to overhaul the reporting of hate crime. Will the minister provide an update on what measures the Scottish Government is planning to make it easier to report hate crimes?

Siobhian Brown: I acknowledge that the recording of non-hate crime and hate crimes is an operational matter for Police Scotland. That is unchanged by the implementation of the 2021 act. Police Scotland is aware that the College of Policing has released guidance and, as far as I am aware, it is considering the recommendations.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Racism (Justice and Community Safety Bodies)

8. **Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what action it is undertaking to tackle racism in justice and

community safety-related public bodies. (S6O-03636)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): I want all our public bodies to be free from racism and discrimination and to reflect the society that they serve. We will continue to work in partnership with all our justice organisations to eradicate racism. For example, Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority are committed to ensuring that our police service is diverse, with a workforce that is reflective of the communities that it serves. Through its policing together strategy, initiatives are under way to improve the diversity of Police Scotland.

The Scottish Government supports the commitments contained in the race equality framework and immediate priorities plan. Through our cross-justice group on race data and evidence, the Government continues to improve our understanding of the experiences of minority ethnic people in the justice system.

Maggie Chapman: The public inquiry into Sheku Bayoh's death in police custody heard that officers could reasonably have assumed that Bayoh was a terrorist solely because of the colour of his skin. Neither the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner nor the Crown Office considered the role that racial prejudice might have played in his death, despite human rights law requirements to do so.

What assurances can the minister provide that our justice system is addressing institutional racism? Will she commit to providing regular updates on the actions and cultural changes that are needed for compliance with human rights laws and the provision of anti-racist services?

Siobhian Brown: First, I say that my thoughts are with the family and friends of Mr Bayoh.

As the member highlighted, the inquiry is examining the immediate circumstances leading to Mr Bayoh's death, the police handling of the case and the investigation into the death, and whether race was a factor. The inquiry can also make recommendations to prevent deaths in similar circumstances.

Counsel for the inquiry has confirmed that the question of whether Mr Bayoh's race played a part will be examined at every stage. As it is a public inquiry and is independent of ministers, it would not be appropriate for the Government to comment on the inquiry proceedings now that they have commenced.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on justice. There will be a brief pause before we move to the final portfolio, to allow members on the front benches to change over.

Education and Skills

Additional Support Needs Teacher Numbers

1. **Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to the impact of a reduction in teacher numbers in some areas on pupils with additional support needs. (S6O-03637)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): We remain fully committed to protecting teacher numbers and are offering local authorities £145.5 million for that purpose in this year's budget. Councils are responsible for providing a complement of teachers and support staff to deliver the best outcomes for all pupils, and I expect them to prioritise that. Spending on additional support for learning by local authorities also reached a record high of £926 million in 2022-23. We have 17,730 pupil support staff, which is also a record high. That is a result of our continued annual investment of £15 million to councils. We also provide £11 million each year to directly support pupils with complex additional support needs and services for children and families.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: The cabinet secretary will know that the Education, Children and Young People Committee's report on additional support for learning says that, regardless of that funding, the situation is still intolerable. The cabinet secretary will also know that having fewer staff in schools impacts the experience of pupils with ASN. Hundreds of people took to the streets to tell Glasgow City Council that on Monday, and the Education, Children and Young People Committee has recognised that in its report, too. However, the Scottish National Party-Green Glasgow City Council did not carry out an equality impact assessment on its cuts to staffing or to MCR Pathways.

Does the cabinet secretary believe that staff and teachers are key to supporting pupils with ASN? Does she think that an equality impact assessment should be carried out before decisions to cut teachers are taken?

Jenny Gilruth: The member alluded to the committee's report on additional support for learning. It is worth saying on the record that I have paused the Government's update to the additional support for learning action plan in order to take cognisance of that report and to respond to the challenge that it presents to ministers. I look forward to sending that update to the committee soon.

The member made specific reference to some of the recent challenges in Glasgow. As I alluded to in my initial response, we are making available to local authorities an extra £145.5 million to

maintain teacher numbers. I know that the Glasgow Labour group's plans would have cut those numbers further—its budget proposals for Glasgow included £30 million of cuts to education and could have meant the loss of up to 650 teachers. We have offered Glasgow City Council funding of £16.5 million in 2024-25 to maintain teacher numbers, which is its share of the £145.5 million.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The member who asked the previous question is well aware that the SNP is the administration in Glasgow City Council. Is it in order for her to misrepresent that fact?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Harvie will know that that is not a point of order. There is a mechanism, which is known to all members, for correcting the record, and that can always be pursued by the member, should they wish to do so. However, the point is now on the record.

Liam Kerr has a supplementary question.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The Education, Children and Young People Committee's report suggests that a reduction in teacher numbers has an impact on pupils' behaviour, whether or not they have additional support needs. What measures has the cabinet secretary taken in response to that report's publication on 15 May specifically to address the behavioural impacts of the reduction in teacher numbers?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank the member for his interest in the issue. As I intimated in my response to Ms Duncan-Glancy, we are protecting £145.5 million in this financial year to maintain teacher numbers, because, as cabinet secretary, I think that it is hugely important that we do so. We also provide additionality in relation to support for additional support for learning staff. This year, we have more than 725—I think—extra additional support for learning assistants.

The member asked a question about the report. I have not yet formally responded to that report, but I look forward to doing so in due course.

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): A constituent in Lothian has a son who was entitled to extra time during an exam due to his attention deficit hyperactivity disorder but had his eligibility for assessment arrangements repeatedly questioned and missed his extra time, which my constituent believes caused stress for his son and impacted his ability to complete his exam. How is the Scottish Government working to ensure that every person with additional support needs is supported during their exams? Will the cabinet secretary look at that case?

Jenny Gilruth: I listened to the member's question in detail. I am a bit rusty on the specifics of how support is administered in schools, but in a previous life I had to administer support for my pupils in terms of extra time and support mechanisms that they might require for their qualifications.

I am happy to look at the detail of that case, but I want to put on the record and respond to the member that the statutory responsibility for the delivery of education rests with local authorities. It would therefore be a matter for the local authority. In my experience, it is usually a matter for the headteacher in the school, but I am happy to look at the detail and to provide support if that would be appropriate.

Further Education (Industrial Dispute)

2. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to end the reported disruption to students in further education, in light of the on-going industrial dispute between College Employers Scotland and the Educational Institute of Scotland Further Education Lecturers Association over pay and conditions. (S6O-03638)

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): Although there is no direct role for the Government to intervene in the dispute, I have made it clear to the college management that they must do everything in their power to ensure that students are not adversely impacted by industrial action, while at the same time doing their best to conclude the dispute.

All appropriate mitigations and support must be in place to minimise disruption to students and provide them with timely information on their options. I have also called on the employers and EIS-FELA to work together to find a way of suspending the marking boycott in order to allow positive progress to be made on settling the dispute and to ensure that students receive the qualifications that they have worked so hard to achieve.

Monica Lennon: I am grateful to the minister and I have listened carefully to his response, but students and college lecturers are already adversely affected.

The Scottish Government's fair work credentials in further education are in tatters. We are seeing anti-worker deeming, threats of compulsory redundancy and the threat of closure of the trade union education centre at City of Glasgow College. The question from picket lines across Scotland, including South Lanarkshire College in my area and New College Lanarkshire, is this: when will the minister intervene to ensure that we see a

funding package that will deliver a decent pay settlement for college lecturers that is consistent with the public sector pay policy, while protecting jobs and ensuring the continuity of course provision for our students?

Graeme Dey: Let us be clear—as Monica Lennon actually has been, and I welcome that—about what Labour means by “intervention”. It means shaking the magic money tree and giving colleges whatever moneys they need to satisfy the demands of the lecturers in this dispute, with no financial detriment to any other part of education delivery.

A pay rise is not even the totality of what is being sought in the dispute and the negotiations. It is not just about committing to a pay uplift for 2025-26 at a stage when the budget that will be available to the Scottish Government—and the colleges—is a complete unknown. It is also about colleges committing to an open-ended, no compulsory redundancies approach and returning all pay that was lost via striking during the present dispute. The price tag for delivering all that would be extremely significant.

The question for Labour is this: when it calls for intervention to settle the dispute, is it expecting all those demands to be met? If so, where would it have us find those sums?

Aberdeenshire Council (Meetings)

3. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when the education secretary last met with Aberdeenshire Council, and what was discussed. (S6O-03639)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): I last met representatives from Aberdeenshire Council on 16 May. We discussed issues around teacher recruitment and retention and the teacher induction scheme.

Alexander Burnett: The cabinet secretary was quick to point out in a reply to me on 3 June that Aberdeenshire Council had welcomed 20 newly qualified secondary school teachers for the coming school year. However, she failed to point out that the council had requested 44 teachers and that this is just the latest case, in a years-long problem, of a rural council not being sent enough teachers. What is the Government going to do to recruit teachers, particularly for our rural communities?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank the member for his interest in the issue. The issue that he raises is not specific to Aberdeenshire; there are challenges in Highland Council and a number of other rural parts of the country. I have worked closely with officials in Aberdeenshire Council and elected members who are in the member’s party to provide support. For example, this year, we have been able to

increase the number of probationers allocated to that area, and the local authority welcomed that in my engagement with it.

More broadly, as the member knows, in answering recent parliamentary questions, I have said that I am keen to look at the probationer scheme and how it is supporting local authorities such as Aberdeenshire Council. We know that, post-pandemic, many probationers are opting not to tick the box to go anywhere—there is a reticence to do that. We need to look again at the probationer scheme, which is fully funded by the Scottish Government, and ensure that it is better meeting the needs of local authorities such as the member’s.

Funded Childcare (Orkney)

4. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the delivery of 1,140 hours of funded childcare in Orkney, in light of the specific challenges faced by island authorities in meeting this requirement. (S6O-03640)

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Natalie Don): The Scottish Government recognises how vital early learning and childcare are in rural and island areas, in relation to giving children the best start in life and supporting families to work. Responsibility for delivering the 1,140 hours of funded ELC that is available to all eligible children in Scotland sits with local authorities, which have a statutory duty to ensure that local provision meets families’ needs. We invest almost £1 billion a year to fully fund that offer, and the costs of provision in rural areas are taken into account in the funding formula.

The Scottish Government has a robust strategy in place for evaluating the national ELC expansion, which will look at accessibility, particularly in rural and deprived communities. We expect to provide an interim update on that this year, with the full report due to be published next year.

Liam McArthur: In recent months, many constituents have contacted me in desperation about the lack of available childcare in Orkney. Anyone who is not working fixed hours or 9 to 5 faces acute problems but, even for those who do, accessing childcare is proving to be increasingly difficult. Childminders are few and far between, wraparound care for school-age children is largely non-existent, and many nurseries do not offer extended hours or support outside of term time. As an island community with a relatively small population, Orkney faces unique challenges in delivering the Government’s commitment to funded childcare. Will the minister agree to work with Orkney Islands Council to provide any

additional support that is required to ensure that my constituents have access to the affordable and flexible childcare that they need and have been promised?

Natalie Don: I absolutely recognise the particular and distinct challenges, barriers and opportunities for rural and island communities. I will continue to listen and look for solutions to the challenges that they face. Our addressing depopulation action plan, which was published in February, sets out the Scottish Government's approach, which is aimed at supporting local communities. The plan acknowledges the important role of early learning and childcare as an important driver of population attraction and retention. The plan also sets out a range of work that is being taken forward to enhance our childcare offering in the context of rural communities, which includes the early adopter communities—I appreciate that that is not relevant in this circumstance—childminder recruitment and our commitment to phase in an expanded national offer for families with two-year-olds.

Over and above that, I am more than happy to meet the member if he would like to discuss the specific challenges further.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 has not been lodged.

Fife College (Pay Dispute)

6. **David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it can take regarding the on-going Fife College staff pay dispute. (S6O-03642)

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): I appreciate that the on-going industrial action at Fife College will be of particular importance to the member and his constituents. Continued industrial action is in no-one's interests, and I continue to actively urge the employers and the Educational Institute of Scotland Further Education Lecturers Association to work collaboratively to find a resolution to the dispute as a matter of priority. Formal talks last Friday saw movement on the part of the union. I understand that further informal discussions have continued since.

David Torrance: I believe that there is a genuine desire on all sides to end the present dispute. I understand that lecturers at Fife College have been warned that their wages might be docked in response to on-going industrial action. Does the minister agree that that is not in the spirit of the National Joint Negotiation Committee? Will he urge the college management to reconsider such actions?

Graeme Dey: I assume that the docking that Mr Torrance refers to is what is known as deeming and relates to a particular aspect of the industrial action—namely, the refusal of some lecturers to upload the marks of students, thereby impeding their progression. As the issue concerns the fulfilling of contractual requirements, it is a local rather than a national matter, as evidenced by the fact that one college is not resorting to deeming, and some others are taking localised approaches.

As I have said before, however, the work of students going unmarked and the response of colleges to that is detrimental to the interests of learners and represents an unhelpful escalation in the dispute. Employers and trade unions must work together to find a way to suspend that element of action short of striking and remove the threat of deeming, not only to take students out of the firing line but to create a better atmosphere in which to try and resolve the wider dispute.

As an aside, I recently met college chairs groups, and I emphasised the importance of their role in seeking to improve employee relations in their colleges. The decision to dock pay is a significant one; as significant is the decision to pursue a marking boycott. I would expect all relevant college boards to be involved in the approval of the suggested approach, particularly in relation to proportionality.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have a number of supplementary questions, and I will take that of Martin Whitfield. I would caution you, Mr Whitfield, that your question is to be supplementary to the question in the *Business Bulletin*, which relates to the on-going Fife College staff pay dispute.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful for your guidance, Deputy Presiding Officer. As the minister has said, the approach that we are discussing has been taken not just in Fife but more widely. Does the minister feel that the approach that has been taken by Fife College, and indeed other colleges, with a battle over legal advice, displays an appropriate tone at this moment in the dispute? Is calling out and docking pay in essence the best way to pursue a settlement, rather than the objective of sitting round the table and discussing the matter?

Graeme Dey: As Mr Whitfield knows, one side in an industrial dispute does something, the other side reacts and the situation escalates thereafter. I do not think that either course of action—either the one that prompted the steps that have been taken or the reaction to it—has been in any way helpful for resolving the dispute. As I said in an earlier response, it does not matter which order things are done in: both sides should get together, park this matter and get on with resolving the dispute.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Erasmus+ (Replacement)

8. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, regarding any specific measures or alternative programmes it is considering as a replacement to Erasmus+ in Scotland, whether it can provide a timeline for any support that may be available for Bishopbriggs academy and other schools. (S6O-03644)

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): In 2023-24, the Government funded a test and learn project to re-establish some of the opportunities that Erasmus+ provided, which the Turing scheme does not. Despite being smaller in scale than Erasmus+, the project supported student and staff exchanges, helped to develop stronger international partnerships between educational institutions and delivered a key action from the international education strategy. We have committed to take the project forward in 2024-25, working in collaboration with education stakeholders. We are planning to use the learning from 2023-24 to develop a programme that provides opportunities for all parts of our education system, schools included.

Rona Mackay: Can the minister assure Bishopbriggs academy, in my constituency, of support to continue its German educational trainee programme, given the impact of Brexit, the withdrawal of Erasmus+ and visa challenges?

Graeme Dey: I understand that Bishopbriggs academy has an excellent languages department, which has benefited from the GET programme and from other programmes such as “Schools: partners for the future”—the PASCH initiative. The Scottish Government is aware of the challenges facing the GET programme, and officials are working with partners to find pragmatic solutions.

Brexit has caused great damage to such programmes. We need an immigration that meets Scotland’s needs, and we urge the UK Government to create better opportunities for young people to enjoy the benefits offered by mobility.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): It has been almost four or five years since the Government removed the Erasmus+ scheme—or since we came out of the Erasmus+ scheme—and the Scottish Government has delayed any action on it. In the time that the Scottish Government has taken to set up a far smaller scheme, 6,000 students in Wales have gone across to 95 different countries. Why has it taken the Scottish Government so long to set up a replacement for Erasmus?

Graeme Dey: I know that the member did not mean to mislead, but she gave the impression that it was this Government that backed out of the Erasmus scheme; it absolutely was not. Let us just get that on the record.

Would I wish that we had been able to move quicker on this matter? Of course I would. We are working very closely with our partners in education—I had a meeting just last week—and particularly with the university sector, on what we have learned from the first year of the test programme and on the asks of the university sector and the college sector and wider asks. I do not just want to have a programme for the sake of having a programme; we want a programme that reflects the needs of the sector.

I have engaged directly with elements of the sector on some of the test work that they did last year, and I have been hugely impressed with it. We will build on that in the coming years.

Liam McArthur: My former Liberal Democrat colleague Kirsty Williams, who was the education minister in Wales who introduced the Taith scheme, was able to do so at pace and, as Pam Duncan-Glancy has indicated, to the benefit of thousands of young people in Wales. Why has the approach taken by the Scottish Government been so different and so much slower than that of its counterpart in Wales?

Graeme Dey: Again, we are looking back the way, but I am trying to look forward, and that is not just out of convenience. We are where we are. As I said in my earlier answer, we are developing a scheme that reflects the aspirations and the asks of the education sector and our young people, and we will seek to build on that in the next few years.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance. At question 6, the minister was asked a very direct question about what action the Scottish Government can take regarding the on-going Fife College staff pay dispute, and that question built on my earlier question at question 2 on what action the Government could take. In response to my question, the minister Graeme Dey asked what the Labour Party would do and, in response to question 6, he gave no answer at all. Is the minister unable or unwilling to take meaningful action to resolve the industrial dispute at Scotland’s colleges?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could we have a point of order, please?

Monica Lennon: What can members do to get proper answers from these ministers?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Lennon. That is not a point of order, as I am sure you are well aware. There are many routes by

which members can pursue answers from the Scottish Government ministers, and I would recommend all those means of procedure to the member to pursue.

That concludes portfolio questions on education and skills. We will turn to the next item of business after a short pause to allow front bench teams to change position, should they so wish.

European Structural and Investment Funds

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a statement by Kate Forbes, the Deputy First Minister, on European structural and investment funds. The Deputy First Minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:12

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): On Thursday 13 June, I made a statement in the chamber on the Scottish Government's current position with regard to European structural and investment funds. That statement addressed the inaccurate reports in the media, and I made it clear that I would make a further statement once both the programmes—the European social fund and the European regional development fund—had formally closed.

I did not expect the next statement to be quite so soon; at that point, I was clear that it was unlikely to be before the second half of 2025. As I said less than a fortnight ago, I would confirm the final outturn figures and outcomes achieved at that point. Until then, estimates of the use of the funding allocations, the final eligible expenditure and the reimbursements from the European Commission are all speculative.

Opposition parties have requested another statement less than a fortnight after my first statement. In the intervening time, nothing has changed, there has been no new information and further reports in the press have not changed the original points that I made. However, I am never one to shy away from stating the facts once again, so I thank the Presiding Officer for the opportunity to repeat and confirm all the points that I made a fortnight ago.

As I explained in my statement less than a fortnight ago, the system for administering and paying out European structural funds is retrospective. Allocations of potential funding are notified to member states at the start of each seven-year programme. Projects are then set up by partner organisations and they incur costs. Those costs are incurred initially and entirely by the organisations themselves. For example, in the third sector, that might be a charity. In the public sector, that might be local government or NatureScot. Those costs are then claimed back from the Scottish Government at our risk. Once we have paid the costs that our partners have incurred, we focus on submitting reimbursement claims to the European Commission, which

reimburses us only after all the evidence has been checked and verified.

Furthermore, the funds cannot be used for core public services, so they cannot be used—as some have suggested—to mitigate the impact of austerity on our national health service, on local government or on core infrastructure. The funds are not a replacement for public sector funding.

The projects that are under discussion all completed their delivery by December 2023. We are currently continuing to check and to pay out on our partners' final claims for the costs of delivering those projects. We will submit substantial reimbursement claims to the European Commission in July—next month—and a final one will be submitted in October this year. Those will include reimbursement claims for all structural fund projects delivered by partners and for eligible funding towards the costs of accommodation and support services for Ukrainian migrants to Scotland. The date of the final reimbursement payments from the European Commission to us will not be until 2025.

As I said in my statement on 13 June, and as is detailed in the Scottish Parliament information centre's briefing, our original allocation of potential funding at the start of the programme was marginally reduced by the European Commission because some of our partners did not meet their annual spending targets. Let me be crystal clear about why that was.

Some partners had overestimated the costs that they would incur and the pace at which they would incur them, others were unable to meet the very strict criteria for projects and some partners struggled to prove eligibility for all their costs. For all those reasons, some potential funding was foregone—as a European Commission official pointed out as a statement of fact back in 2019. Changes to funding allocations have happened in other parts of the United Kingdom and, indeed, across Europe over the past 40 years of the programmes.

However, no money was handed back. It is simply the case that the ceiling of total funding allocations to Scotland was lowered. That did not impact on the delivery of any projects that were under way or on the ability of any partners to extend projects or to claim funding back from the Scottish Government. Those points are important, because the contrary has been claimed publicly.

As I said previously, Scottish Government officials repeatedly encourage our partners, including via the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, to spend their allocations, to put forward any new projects or to expand existing ones to maximise the use of the funds. However, as I explained before, many projects and types of

spending are simply not eligible. European structural funds cannot be used for anything whose funding could or should be met from regular domestic budgets; it must be additional.

In previous years, Scotland was involved in each of the funding cycles, which meant that projects that did not secure funding in one cycle—perhaps because of timescale constraints—could always consider the subsequent cycle. The difference here is that the cycle that is under consideration is the final cycle. There is a definitive end point entirely, because we are no longer in the European Union and are not benefiting from the current cycle of funding that is being distributed. That is not a decision that the Scottish people supported by a majority. In fact, we are in that situation entirely because the current UK Government removed Scotland from the European Union and, by extension, from eligibility for the next cycle.

Although all parties are entitled to scrutinise the decisions that the Government takes—questions on which I look forward to answering—there is a great irony in the fact that the current situation has become of interest only because Scottish projects will not benefit from any future funding cycles of European structural funds. That decision is formally supported by the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, which have both stated publicly that they do not support a return to the European Union for Scotland.

A full and up-to-date list of Scotland's European structural fund projects and the partners that delivered them is available on the Scottish Government website. Members can see the huge range of projects and programmes that have been supported through European funding. Many local authorities have provided debt management, fuel poverty, housing and education advice programmes in their areas, such as Perth and Kinross Council's positive futures project, which have been part funded by the European social fund.

The supporting new Scots in Stirling project provided a holistic service, including money management, benefits advice, social inclusion activities and courses in English for speakers of other languages to the growing number of refugees who are settling in the Stirling Council area. That ESF-supported project offered eligible participants access to specialist money support and training, often from the very first day of their arrival in Stirling.

On a bigger scale, employability pipeline projects that were delivered by councils across Scotland supported people with multiple barriers to give them a better chance of securing employment. The youth employment initiative in the west of Scotland helped young people aged 16

to 24 years old to access the labour market. That support also came through the European social fund.

The European regional development fund has supported the Medical Device Manufacturing Centre to the tune of £1.6 million. The MDMC project is made up of a team of engineers, scientists and clinicians from four universities, who provide medical device developers with advice, access to manufacturing facilities, engineering and technical expertise, and regulatory advice, which is for companies that are seeking to translate device concepts into commercial products. The team has a comprehensive suite of manufacturing equipment that is installed in dedicated labs at Heriot-Watt University, which ranges from laser-based manufacturing equipment to medical device packaging and environmental testing equipment.

ERDF funding also contributed £10.6 million to connecting communities across the Highlands and Islands. The Scottish Government's £21 million 4G infill programme is improving Scotland's rural mobile phone coverage in selected not-spots—areas where no commercial coverage has been rolled out. Without intervention, those rural areas would miss out on improved connectivity and the benefits that that brings to home life, working life and the wider local economy. Thanks to ERDF support, police, ambulance and mountain rescue emergency services can provide a rapid response to local and national crises, with better resilience offered as a result of improved communication between people in control rooms and those who are out in the field.

For local communities, improved 4G coverage potentially makes their areas more attractive to tourists and offers social benefits, such as improved access to services and the ability to keep in touch during Covid-19. It certainly makes my life a lot easier when I am working as I travel across the Highlands and Islands.

All those projects are testament to the immense benefits that European funding has delivered over the years. They represent just a snapshot of the benefits that European structural funds have brought to Scotland's businesses and communities. Those projects are all from the current programming period, which will, sadly, be our last as we enter the lengthy process to formally bring them to a close.

As I said less than a fortnight ago, every pound or euro that can be claimed back will be claimed back. I will report on that when the final position is confirmed. I hope that my next statement will not be in another two weeks.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The Deputy First Minister will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow

about 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the Deputy First Minister for prior sight of her statement.

I made the request for a second statement because of the total lack of clarity on the part of the Scottish Government in explaining the facts about what has happened to large sums of EU taxpayers' money. Today's statement still leaves questions unanswered, so I seek complete clarity on the following issues.

First, the minutes of a meeting on 14 November 2019 that was chaired by the Scottish Government and attended by representatives of lead partners and European Commission officials show that the Scottish Government advised the meeting that the managing authority—the Scottish Government—was

“unable to pay claims until the suspension is lifted.”

That was backed up in the statement in the Scottish Government's consolidated accounts for 2018-19. However, just a few days ago, in a comment to *The Times*, the Scottish Government said:

“In practice, no payments were affected.”

That cannot be correct, and I ask the Deputy First Minister to comment on that.

Secondly, for complete clarity once and for all, exactly how much EU money has been left on the table unspent because the relevant deadlines for claims have passed?

Thirdly, how many times did the structures between the Scottish Government and local authorities for distributing the funds in Scotland change between 2014 and December 2023 in order to address audit failings?

Kate Forbes: I thank the member for her clear questions, which I will go through one by one, because they are quite simple to answer.

On the first question, in relation to the minutes that she quotes, I say directly to her that at no point did the Scottish Government pause the payment to our partners of the funding that they had incurred. She is right to quote directly from the minutes, but I say unequivocally that the Scottish Government paid out the funding at our own risk. We recognised the costs that had been incurred, and the Scottish Government ensured that we paid out the funds to the partners. There was no, as it were, lost opportunity from our partners' perspective when they incurred the costs.

Secondly, the member asked a very direct question about EU funding. Presiding Officer, I realise that, like the last time I did this, my

answers might be lengthy, but it is a complex issue and I want to be clear. On EU funding, I can give the member these figures in euros. The current allocation that we have in terms of the upper ceiling is €783.4 million. The current amount committed to projects to date is €647 million. Two elements will determine how much higher that figure is. The first is that we are currently going through meeting the July deadline and then the October deadline for securing reimbursement. The second is the funding that we will be able to reclaim for settling Ukrainian migrants.

I am not in a position to give the member that figure right now, because the deadlines are still ahead of us. We intend to claim back every penny that we can. The final deadline is late 2025, and I will be delighted to return to the chamber in 2025 with an update on the outturn figures. Until that point, all that I can give is a snapshot in advance of the deadline.

Thirdly, the structure has remained pretty much the same over the past 40 years in relation to reimbursement to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Government being responsible for reclaiming from the European Commission.

Thank you for the additional time, Presiding Officer. I hope that that is clear.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I begin by pointing out that, in 2019, zero pounds was handed to partners by the Scottish Government. That fact was provided to me in an answer to a parliamentary question that I received just this week. Any further clarity on that in writing would be appreciated.

I take issue with the Deputy First Minister saying:

“no money was handed back. It is simply the case that the ceiling of total funding allocations to Scotland was lowered.”

It is clear that there were “lost opportunities”, and European Commission officials expressed that to the Scottish Government according to the minutes of meetings that were held in June 2019. The European Commission was absolutely clear that there were lost opportunities. The same minutes say that the projects were “haemorrhaging money”. It is absolutely clear that there were significant problems. The initial reduction amounted to €157.6 million of lost opportunity to Scotland, and the Scottish Parliament information centre believes that the entire exposure—the minimum loss—is €294 million.

On 4 June, the Deputy First Minister said in the chamber:

“There has been no conclusion to the scheme. It will continue, and we will endeavour to spend as much of it as possible.”—[*Official Report*, 4 June 2024; c 3.]

However, on 20 June, a Government official was quoted in *The Times* as saying,

“all projects supported by European Structural Funds were completed by December 2023”,

and the Deputy First Minister has confirmed that position today. The two statements are entirely contradictory. It is confirmed that that is absolutely the case.

As a result of that December deadline, the Deputy First Minister’s officials must now have a number. They will seek to maximise the reclaims, but what is the exposure of the Scottish Government right now? What is that figure, which must have been set in December?

Kate Forbes: I will endeavour to answer those questions as well. I will start with the minutes that were quoted in relation to the engagement with European Commission officials. That speaks to the fact that we have engaged extensively and frequently with European Commission officials. The fact that that was five years ago speaks to constant monitoring of the situation. We also received an extension, which we were encouraged to use—and which we are using—to claim back the funding. I have already set out the deadlines of July and October, which is an extension. We do not expect to be an outlier in any way compared with previous schemes or compared with the rest of the UK.

On the point that the member distinguishes about 2019, we absolutely did pay out to partners in 2019. That relates to Liz Smith’s question. I appreciate that it is complex, and this answer is not intended to be patronising, but there are two elements. There is the money that the Scottish Government reclaims from the European Commission and there is the money that our partners get. From our partners’ perspective, they know that they have incurred costs, and they just want those costs to be covered. Their costs were covered; at no point did partners not receive the funds that they needed to cover their costs. Those were covered by the Scottish Government at our risk, and I have made that clear.

The second element is what we reclaimed from the European Commission. It has been well documented that there was a suspension in 2019 from the European Commission to the Scottish Government. We worked with the European Commission and that was resolved, but from our partners’ perspective—from a charities perspective and a local government perspective—there was never any pause. There was no lost opportunity in that regard. If more information is required, I am happy to deliver it.

On what the member perceives to be a distinction between what was said earlier and what was said today, there is no distinction. I have said

clearly that we are engaged in a reimbursement process right now and we will not know the final outturn figures until 2025. I have given the figures that we are privy to now, but we will not know the final figures until 2025. I do not intend to mislead Parliament by giving figures that are only a snapshot in time, when we need to reclaim the full reimbursement and the funding to cover the resettling of Ukrainian migrants.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A number of members are seeking to ask questions. I appreciate the complexity of the subject, but perhaps we could have a wee bit of brevity.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement. How do the EU structural and investment expenditure funds that have already been spent or will be spent by the end of this financial tranche compare with the resources that will be allocated by the UK Government once that resource is no longer available? Does the cabinet secretary agree that the Tory position on the matter is astonishing given its complete inability to deliver levelling-up funds that were allegedly committed years ago, including £23.7 million for my constituency?

Kate Forbes: It will not surprise the member to hear that there has been no comparable replacement funding from the UK Government. The closest that we have is the shared prosperity fund, but if we compare EU funding with the UK Government's replacement funding, we can see that the new regime is short term, that decision making is opaque and that we do not have the same level of autonomy that we used to enjoy when we were in the European Union.

I imagine that we all represent communities and constituents who know the benefit of the funding that came from the European Union and are extremely exercised to know that they cannot apply for that same EU funding and frustrated by the complete lack of transparency about how to apply for comparable funding such as the shared prosperity fund.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I will go back to the second question that my colleague Liz Smith asked, in response to which the Deputy First Minister quoted two figures: the sum that was allocated by the EU, which was €783.4 million, and the sum that was committed, which was €647 million. That leaves a balance of €136 million not committed by the end of the 2023 deadline, which has now passed. Can any of that €136 million now be recovered?

Kate Forbes: With respect, that is precisely why, when Michael Marra and others ask me to give figures, they struggle to appreciate the distinction between giving a snapshot in time—

where we stand right now—and where we expect to be when the outturn figures are published in 2025.

My point is that we expect the reimbursement process to take place during the next few months. It is an on-going discussion with the European Commission. I am not able to predict precisely where we will land in October, because it is a two-way discussion. Layered on top of that, we have the on-going discussions about reimbursement for Ukrainian refugees.

We are engaged in that programme and the projects that were concluded by December 2023 are what I cited in my statement, but I look forward to coming back in 2025 and being able to give final figures.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): There is much chest beating and there are claims of lost money here, yet the position remains the same. The replacement UK structural fund first round, granted by the UK Government, was £212 million over three years to Scotland. If we were still in the EU, Scotland would have got £549 million over three years. Surely that is a shortfall of £337 million that was lost as a result of Tory Brexit madness and Labour-handmaiden-enabled Brexit madness.

Kate Forbes: I have already given my comments on the shared prosperity fund, which is opaque to constituents, centralised and difficult to engage with. In sharp contrast, the seven-year structural fund and, before that, the cohesion programmes enabled truly long-term and valuable projects to be delivered.

I repeat a point that I made in my statement: previously, being part of each cycle as it developed meant that an organisation that missed out on one cycle always knew that there was another cycle to come, which meant that it was not constrained by the timescales that we are currently constrained by. It meant that, in one sense, money could be carried over into future cycles—it was not expressly like that, but that was certainly the experience of our partners. The difference here is that there is a definitive end point and we intend to claim back every penny that can be claimed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Paul Sweeney, who is joining us remotely.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Two weeks ago, when I asked about the Citizens Theatre redevelopment project, which has a capital funding gap of between £7 million and £15 million, the cabinet secretary told me that the Citizens Theatre project would need to meet strict criteria set out by the European Commission in order to be able to access vital funding to ensure that the project does not collapse. That is despite the fact that

£11.7 million of Government and council capital grant funding has already been committed and sunk into the project.

It seems to me that the cabinet secretary is now suggesting that the remaining European structural funds are not available to the overrunning Citizens Theatre project, despite it being the sort of cultural heritage project that would typically be funded by European structural funds. Is this not now simply an example of Government mismanagement that has squandered available funding that could have been used to reinforce that critical project in Glasgow?

Kate Forbes: No. The point that I made in my previous answer was that the criteria that are set by the European Commission are extremely strict and quite rigid. That is one of the reasons why not many organisations are eligible to claim back that funding, and that has been the feedback from some of our partners as well.

We are keen to engage with Paul Sweeney on the substantive issue of the Citizens Theatre and to ensure that we support the project to be as successful as possible. I know that conversations are on-going with the relevant minister in that regard.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To follow on from Michelle Thomson's question, the Deputy First Minister said in her statement that, in previous years, Scotland was involved in each of the funding cycles, which meant that projects that did not secure funding in one cycle could always consider the subsequent cycle. Is the effect of all this that, if we had still been in the EU, we could still be looking at continuing funding but, because we have been forced out of the EU, we have in effect had to jump off a moving bus and that is why we have hit this hard deadline?

Kate Forbes: That is right. When I addressed Parliament earlier this month, I stated that Scotland stands to lose access to significant funding that was theoretically replaced by EU structural funds. However, the member is right to talk about the cycles. At the end of every funding period, any leftover funding would usually count towards the next funding period. Because of Brexit, there are no future funds and that means that Scotland will lose out on significant funding of euros that could be received by projects across the country.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I share the frustration at those members who are happy that we are out of the European Union but pretend to be sad that we have lost European funding. However, I am still unclear about some of the DFM's answers in response to media reports. Has she seen the report claiming that a paper was presented to the Scottish Government's

programme monitoring committee in June 2019 that referred to

"serious deficiencies in the [managing authority's]"—

that is, the Scottish Government's—

"management and control system for the [structural funds]."

Is that report accurate? What deficiencies were being referred to? Was anything done to correct them?

Kate Forbes: I have seen the report that Patrick Harvie refers to. I have briefly answered some of the comments about the fact that the Scottish Government took on board the points that were relayed to it by the European Commission. The important point to make is that our partners did not see a loss of funding. In 2019, the European Commission suspended its reimbursement payments for both the ESF and the ERDF programmes due to changes and improvements that needed to be made in the management and control of the programmes that had been identified by auditors in 2016-17. A wholesale improvement programme was put in place in order to ensure that there was absolute compliance with the regulations. The reimbursements restarted in 2020 and 2022 respectively. Importantly, that did not interrupt the payments of partners' claims by the Scottish Government. All parts of the UK and many other member states have gone through a similar scenario during which their programmes have been suspended at one time or another in order to allow for improvements to be made.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): It is my understanding that the allocation of the EU structural and investment funding is done on a multi-annual basis. I am conscious that the funding period that was referred to in the statement has included a Brexit referendum, subsequent negotiations and a worldwide pandemic. Therefore, does the Deputy First Minister think that we need to be mindful of the particular context that was faced during that funding period and how that impacted partners and their projects?

Kate Forbes: The member is right. I was finance secretary during Covid and we know the impact that that had on many of the initiatives and projects across the country. Most of the projects that are being funded by European funding are delivered by third sector organisations, local government and organisations such as NatureScot. Clearly, their activities and work were disrupted. We have sought to support them to ensure that they can maximise their claims from the European Commission, but in some cases the entire remit of their projects changed. As I said in my statement, they concluded that the work that they had planned would no longer be done and

that the costs that they had intended to incur would no longer be incurred.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I will try again to get an answer to the question that was posed by my colleagues and has been avoided by the Deputy First Minister. I will put it really simply: how much of the €136 million that was not committed at the end of 2023 is still eligible to be reclaimed?

Kate Forbes: We will try to reclaim all of it.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): The democratic will of Scotland was to remain in the EU, and Westminster has ignored that at every opportunity since. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that the best funding arrangement between Scotland and the EU would be one in which an independent Scotland is once again part of the EU, as opposed to Scotland being forced to sit on the benches by Westminster?

Kate Forbes: There is a complete irony in the questions that have been asked about my statement. The bulk of the scrutiny and the opposition has come from two parties that believe in never again allowing Scotland to be eligible for European funding. That speaks to the situation in which we find ourselves as a country—there is much empty opposition that completely defeats the purpose, when it should be about maximising the support that is available for communities and constituents around the country. The SNP Government would much rather we were benefiting from all the funding rounds, rather than just fixating on the ones that we can no longer claim from.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement on European structural and investment funds. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business in order to allow front-bench teams to change position should they wish.

Climate Emergency

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on S6M-13759, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scottish Government priorities: tackling the climate emergency. I invite those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:45

The Minister for Climate Action (Gillian Martin): The First Minister has confirmed that tackling the climate crisis is one of his top priorities for the Government, alongside eradicating child poverty, growing the economy and improving public services. The commitment to tackling climate change, both in Scotland and internationally, has long been at the heart of this Government. Indeed, in Scotland, we were among the first to take bold early action, and we continue to lead globally in responding to the climate emergency. The twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss are clearly with us now, and tackling them is the collective fight of all of us, in our lifetime, given that they are perhaps the single greatest long-term threats that we face globally.

The motion calls on Parliament to recommit itself to the undeniable imperative for action. The science and evidence are clear about not only the scale and the urgency of climate change, but the importance of being part of international action as well as pushing forward domestically. Our domestic and international aspirations come together in an unwavering commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2045. That is five years ahead of the United Kingdom, and it is still one of the most ambitious targets in the world.

However, a just transition to net zero by 2045 will require genuine transformational action and investment across our economy and society, with significant changes in sectors including energy, heat, buildings, transport and agriculture. Just as this Parliament set that high ambition for 2045, it is essential that we come together to reaffirm it and the action that is needed to meet it. All too often, however, modest measures that the Scottish Government has brought forward have not been supported. I hope that this can be a point at which to reset, because we need action, not just talk.

I want to talk about our role in addressing the global challenge of climate change. In 2012, we were the first Government to establish a climate justice fund solely committed to supporting the most climate-vulnerable communities in the global south to build resilience to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. We were the first global north Government to commit finance

explicitly to address loss and damage, and we have helped to galvanise global ambition, with more than \$750 million now committed worldwide.

Recent programmes have included support for the urban dimension of loss and damage, supporting households in Malawi following the devastation of tropical storm Freddy, and piloting an innovative approach through a loss-and-damage window with Scotland's humanitarian emergency fund.

Those projects have been critical to supporting those countries, and actions that are focused on helping individuals and communities with the impact of climate change are a hallmark of our approach domestically as well as internationally.

As European co-chair of the Under2 Coalition, we have driven international co-operation to further collective climate action. I am pleased to announce today that Scotland will take over the presidency of the Regions4 development network, which is a network of states, regions and devolved Governments that are focused on tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss and advancing sustainable development.

Our international role is rooted in what we have done domestically and where we can point to real progress. We are now exactly halfway to net zero, with Scotland achieving the largest reduction in emissions of any nation in the UK between 1990 and 2022, and we have decarbonised faster than the average of the European Union's 27 countries.

That is reflected in the action that we are taking. For example, we have the most comprehensive network of electric vehicle public charging points per head of population in the UK outside London. We are now supporting low-emission zones, to bring clean air to Scotland's cities and help to protect public health. We have some of the most generous grants and loans in the UK to encourage the switch to cleaner forms of heating and to make energy efficiency improvements.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): It is not possible to get solar panel funding in Scotland, although it still is possible south of the border, so ours is not the most generous system. Do you not agree that we need to do way more to encourage and support people to decarbonise their homes?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please speak through the chair.

Gillian Martin: Ms Boyack and I recently had an exchange on that very point and why we are focusing the funding that is available to us on encouraging the switch from emitting and polluting heating systems. That could mean the switch from a gas boiler to a heat pump. We have had to make tough decisions with regard to where we focus that money. However, if a new UK Government wants

to give us more consequentials in that area, we will look again at that policy.

In recent years, more than 75 per cent of all tree planting in the UK has been in Scotland.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister give way on that point?

Gillian Martin: I will do so in a second.

The Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill, which will shortly complete its parliamentary process, will support Scotland's transition to a zero-waste and circular economy by significantly increasing reuse and recycling rates, modernising and improving waste and recycling services, and building on a range of transformational measures that we are already putting in place, including banning problematic single-use plastic items, reforming extended producer responsibility for packaging, and our on-going £70 million investment in local authority recycling infrastructure.

Edward Mountain: I had to intervene on the issue of tree planting. Of course, we have hardly met our tree-planting targets in the past six years, so we are about 20,000 hectares behind where we should be. This year, we threw 10 million trees on the scrap heap because we cut the planting grants. Is the Government proud of that? Is it just going to say, "We are planting more trees," but ignore the fact that it cannot reach its targets and is scrapping trees?

Gillian Martin: Key to our delivering on the ambitious targets that we put in place is having the capital funding that allows us to fund all those programmes. I said that to Ms Boyack and I am saying it to Mr Mountain as well. If we want to be a front runner in all those areas, we have to understand that they have to be funded. When there are cuts to our capital budget or inflationary rises that we did not have any hand in, it is difficult to meet those commitments. Members will notice that, in my speech, I make the point that there has to be investment in funding against all of those actions.

Our commitment to net zero will help to boost our economic—

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister give way briefly on that point?

Gillian Martin: No—I have taken too many interventions already.

Scotland's economy grew by 67 per cent in real terms between 1990 and 2022, at the same time as we cut in half our greenhouse gas emissions. That demonstrates that tackling climate change and growing our economy absolutely go hand in hand.

We want to combine Scotland's vibrant entrepreneurial nation, world-leading academic

and research institutions, valuable natural resources and our businesses and communities in a shared agenda to deliver net zero. As part of that, we will help businesses and investors through the development and delivery of our green industrial strategy, so that the people of Scotland can share in the enormous economic opportunities of the global transition to net zero.

One of the key areas in which we are seizing those opportunities is in our vision for Scotland to become a renewables powerhouse, which the people of Scotland will see the benefit from. In 2022, 87.9 per cent of electricity generation came from zero carbon or low-carbon sources. That has already brought huge benefits to Scotland in economic growth, export opportunities and well-paid skilled jobs. That was evidenced by recent significant investments by Sumitomo at Nigg and Haventus at Ardersier.

ScotWind is absolutely central to that ambition. As the world's largest commercial round for floating offshore wind, it has put Scotland at the forefront of offshore wind development globally.

We see huge potential for Scotland in hydrogen production, too. There is great demand for green hydrogen, and Scotland is well placed to develop a significant hydrogen sector that will create a lot of jobs and income for the nation as a whole, whether by using hydrogen domestically or by exporting it to other countries.

Similarly, our approach to net zero will ensure support for our commitment to ending child poverty. For example, our policy of making public transport more accessible and affordable is a key part of that approach. Our Scotland-wide bus schemes offer free travel to a larger percentage of the population than is the case anywhere else in the United Kingdom, and our ScotRail's peak fares removal pilot is a first in the UK.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Certainly, the free fares for under-22s are welcome, but the reality is that someone might have a bus pass but cannot get a bus. Bus services in a lot of our communities are in utter chaos. Do you accept that we need to look at total bus provision?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, please.

Gillian Martin: Hundreds of millions of pounds have been put into the bus network; however, I am a rural MSP, and I absolutely recognise that, in constituencies such as mine, long after the deregulation of bus services, a lot of action has been needed from successive Governments to put more investment into rural networks in particular. That is what we are committed to doing.

We also have a range of policy interventions that are designed to decrease fuel poverty, and we continue to press for reform at source in the reserved areas that affect that. Moreover, the just transition plans are in development for transport, agriculture and land reform, and buildings and construction, as is the site-specific plan for Grangemouth, which all demonstrates that commitment and action.

We are also strengthening Scotland's resilience to the impacts of climate change, and we will set out how we are doing that with the publication of our Scottish national adaptation plan later this year. We are consulting on a new national flood resilience strategy right now.

Given the constraints of devolution, we cannot do this alone. Scotland lacks the full range of levers to deal with the long-term challenges in the way that others can. We also want to make the point that the UK needs to invest significantly in climate action if both Scotland and the UK are to meet their targets on net zero. One of us cannot do it without the other. The impact of the former UK Government's wrong-headed real-terms cut to Scotland's capital funding of almost 9 per cent over five years is having an impact on what we do. We have heard about that today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, will you please bring your remarks to a close?

Gillian Martin: I hope that Parliament recognises the urgency of tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, as the science and the imperative to be part of global action demand. The Government remains fully committed to rising to the challenge and reaping the economic benefits of a just and fair transition to net zero.

I move,

That the Parliament reaffirms its unwavering commitment to tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss through a just and fair transition; believes firmly in, and accepts, climate science and expert advice and its importance in reaching net zero, and rejects, therefore, climate science denial.

15:57

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I must admit that I am a bit perplexed about why the Scottish National Party has decided to bring to the chamber a debate on the subject of the climate emergency when it has failed so dismally to meet its own climate targets and obligations.

Only six days ago, it was revealed that another target has been missed. That brings the grand total to nine failures out of 13 targets. The devolved SNP Government is asking the public to judge it on its record. That record is one of failure,

overpromising, underdelivering and an abandonment of industries in the north-east.

To come to the chamber today and laud so-called achievements is complete nonsense. I have no idea how the minister can say such things with a straight face.

Gillian Martin: Would Douglas Lumsden call £500 million of investment in the supply chain for ScotWind and £500 million of investment in a just transition plan “abandonment of ... the north-east”?

Douglas Lumsden: We could look at how much the budget was cut for the just transition fund this year—I think that that was 75 per cent.

Let me go back to the Climate Change Committee report that was published in March and remind the Government what the committee’s conclusions were. The committee reported that the Scottish Government was failing to achieve Scotland’s climate goals. It said that emissions targets have been repeatedly missed, and that

“the publication of Scotland’s draft Climate Change Plan has been delayed”

again. There is still no sign of the plan. When will we see it?

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy (Màiri McAllan): I am proud of the progress that we have made, but it is clear that targets have been missed. What contribution to those targets being missed would Douglas Lumsden attribute to his party’s position on low-emission zones and workplace parking, or to his colleagues in the Scotland Office completely bringing the deposit return scheme to an end?

Douglas Lumsden: Once again, we see the Scottish Government taking no responsibility. As far as I am aware, the Conservative Party has not blocked anything that is coming through the Scottish Parliament. Only the Greens and the SNP are blocking issues—as we saw yesterday, when they blocked our proposals to put back recycling targets into legislation.

All those questions should be the focus of the Scottish Government’s remarks today, not false patting on the back for the great achievement of missing targets and failing in its obligations on climate change.

The Climate Change Committee also noted that the policy and plans that the Government had in place would not be enough to achieve the legal targets that are required under the Climate Change Act 2008. There was significant concern, particularly in relation to devolved areas of competence including buildings, transport, agriculture, land use and waste. Yet again, rather than coming forward with a clear plan for how we

can move forward, the devolved SNP Government is coming forward with platitudes and promises.

If we are to meet our obligations, we need a clear plan with achievable and measurable targets that works with communities and industries. We also need a Government that will take that forward and deliver a true, just transition for everyone in Scotland as we move towards more renewable energy sources. However, we have no plan in Scotland.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I am delighted to hear Douglas Lumsden talk about renewable energy and the need to invest in it. Does he acknowledge that it is critical to build the transmission infrastructure that is required in the north-east in order to get the renewable energy from where it is being generated to where it needs to be consumed? Why does his party not back the development of the Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks transmission lines that are so desperately needed?

Douglas Lumsden: That is because the infrastructure will have to be done with communities, not to communities—it cannot be done by riding roughshod over them. There needs to be proper consultation, and that is not happening with the communities that I talk to.

The SNP Government committed to publishing a route map for the delivery of around 25,000 electric vehicle charging points by 2030. Yet here we are, halfway through 2024, with no indication of how that will be achieved. To meet that target, the Government will have to install 384 charging points a month from now until the end of 2029. Does anyone in the chamber believe that that will happen? We need a plan.

The devolved Government also stated that it will decarbonise our railway by 2035. That sounds great, but there is no plan to do that. When I ask when the 50-year-old diesel intercity 125s will be replaced, I do not get an answer. When I ask whether the east coast main line between Aberdeen and the central belt will be electrified, I get no answer. When I ask when the promised £200 million to reduce journey times between Aberdeen and the central belt by 20 minutes will happen, which is meant to be by 2026, I do not get an answer. The SNP Government has broken so many promises. That is why it simply cannot be trusted any more.

Given the failure to meet nine of the current 13 targets, members will forgive our scepticism. That scepticism is well placed. Audit Scotland has said that the climate change governance arrangements are missing core elements. The Scottish Government is facing legal challenge for the mismanagement of the introduction of the deposit

return scheme. It is missing four of the six recycling targets. The Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill, which will complete its passage through Parliament today, will do little to increase those rates. The Scottish Conservatives lodged sensible amendments to drive up recycling rates, but each one was knocked back by the SNP and the so-called Greens.

Gillian Martin: I would be really interested to know what Douglas Lumsden's plan is for transforming and decarbonising Scotland's sectors, given that he has said that we are failing to do that. What would he do that is different from, for example, the electricity infrastructure that Mark Ruskell mentioned?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I can give Douglas Lumsden that time back.

Douglas Lumsden: On electricity infrastructure, I have already said that we would work with communities to put in place infrastructure that works for those communities.

Gillian Martin: There is no plan then.

Douglas Lumsden: It is quite clear that there is no climate change plan from this Government. It was meant to be here over a year ago, but we have no sign of it whatsoever. We have no idea when it will be here.

It is vital that, in our deliberations and decision making on climate change, we listen to experts and follow the science. We know that nuclear is a viable, safe and desirable alternative to carbon-based fuels, but the Scottish Government has discounted it without looking at the science.

Scotland is at risk of being left behind globally in the move to smaller, more locally based nuclear power. The Scottish Government should look again at the issue and listen to science and experts in the field. The contribution of nuclear to our energy mix is vital, but it is currently being run down, with no plans to replace it. That must be looked at again to ensure that we have a stable energy mix.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Douglas Lumsden: Is there time for more interventions, Deputy Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you a bit more time.

Clare Haughey: Is Mr Lumsden offering up his region as a site for a new nuclear power plant? Has he consulted his constituents about that?

Douglas Lumsden: We cannot do anything, because the SNP Government will not allow anything. However, if we look at where we have

had nuclear power plants in the past, we will see that those communities have been in favour of them.

Let me turn to the oil and gas sector. We have had so many debates about that important topic in the past six months. We remember that thousands of jobs are associated with the industry in the north-east and beyond.

We know that oil and gas will remain a key part of our energy mix for some time to come. We all agree that we should be moving away from carbon-based fuels and towards renewables, but we cannot turn our back on the oil and gas industry and leave it with a cliff edge, as proposed by the devolved SNP Government.

Importing oil and gas from abroad is more expensive and more detrimental to the environment. Production of natural gas from the UK continental shelf creates less than half as much greenhouse gases as imported liquefied natural gas does. While there is still a need for oil and gas, we should be working with the industry in the north-east to produce them here and to support those businesses and jobs moving forward. There should be no presumption against new licences, but that is the damaging policy of the SNP.

The SNP Government has a brass neck coming to the chamber today to talk about climate change. It is standing on a funeral pyre of failed promises when it comes to climate targets—nine out of 13 have been missed so far. There is no clear plan to meet targets, no published climate change plan, no indication of when that plan might be published, no plan on EV infrastructure roll-out, and no clear plan on decarbonising our railway. The Scottish Conservatives are the only party that is offering Scotland a just transition and a clear plan towards our climate change goals.

I am pleased to move the amendment in my name.

I move amendment S6M-13759.3, to insert at end:

“; urges the Scottish Government, in light of this, to reverse its anti-science approach to new nuclear technology; notes that the Scottish Government has missed nine of the past 13 climate change targets, and that its decision to scrap the 2030 target reflected concerns raised by the Climate Change Committee that the Scottish Government's approach to climate change was no longer feasible and had no clear delivery plan; urges the Scottish Government to be transparent with its approach to climate change and to publish the Climate Change Plan as soon as possible, and recognises that the proposed new Climate Change Bill should be appropriately scrutinised and contain realistic targets to help Scotland reach net zero.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Sarah Boyack to speak to and move amendment S6M-13759.2.

16:06

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): We have now passed two climate change acts in Scotland—in 2009 and in 2019—and there was cross-party support for both of them. However, the SNP Government has failed to reach nine out of the 13 annual targets that it set, so it has never been more important to act.

I thought that the purpose of today's debate would be to try to bring people together, but we did not hear what concrete plans the Scottish Government wants to put in place to address the climate emergency. We need more than warm words. We do not need delayed strategy after delayed strategy, but real action, because it is the action that has been missing, not the ambition. The SNP keeps saying that the now-abandoned 2030 targets were always unachievable, but when they were first introduced, the UK Committee on Climate Change wrote to the Scottish Government and listed the areas where it could take direct immediate action if it wanted to achieve those ambitious targets, which Labour supported. That has not happened.

Màiri McAllan: Sarah Boyack is absolutely right to talk about the deliberations that took place prior to the passing of the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019, but the CCC's advice following passage of the bill stated:

"we find that the legislated 2030 target of a 75% reduction in Scottish emissions goes beyond any of our five scenarios for emissions reduction by that date."

The CCC went on to set out some potential options, which were embedded in the use of carbon capture and storage. Does Sarah Boyack regret, as I do, that the UK Government has failed to deploy CCS in the time since the 2019 act was passed?

Sarah Boyack: The point is that every time the UK CCC has commented on the climate targets, it has come up with practical solutions that have not been followed. It is not just about carbon capture; it is also about the work at Grangemouth. There were a raft of options that could have been taken but have not been taken. That is my frustration. From 2009, a lot more could have been done.

A lot of the ideas that Scottish Labour would support are policies that would be practical and could be done, and which the SNP talks about but has not delivered. Reducing car kilometres, decarbonising domestic heating and restoring biodiversity through sustainable land use are pragmatic things that can be done, as is, crucially, the transition to renewable energy. When I set targets on that during the first session of this Parliament, they were seen as radical, but we have come far along the track since then. There is so much more that we need to do. I honestly

thought that today we were going to hear more about what was going to happen in terms of action and delivery.

The most recent UK Climate Change Committee report criticised that lack of action. It is not enough just to claim that we will reduce car kilometres by 20 per cent. How will we do it? During the cross-party group on sustainable transport's recent poverty inquiry, the message came through loud and clear that we need affordable, reliable and accessible rail and bus services for people who are able to use them, in rural areas in particular but right across the country. People do not have the opportunity to use their bus passes, as that is simply not possible if there are no routes. We need more safe active travel routes. Simply exploring ideas such as an integrated transport ticketing system—an idea from 2012—will not cut it.

Right across every sector, we can see the same story. I mentioned decarbonising heat, which is vital. The minister's earlier answer to me on solar fundamentally misunderstood that the transition that people want to make needs to be supported. For example, the SNP Government failed to deliver the £133 million that it had budgeted for to retrofit people's homes and which would have transformed fuel poverty.

Gillian Martin: In a scenario in which there is a limited budget, is it better to focus that budget on decarbonising home heating or to spread it among other technologies and not have the same impact?

Sarah Boyack: I will come right back on that. People who have written to me have said that they were first going to install solar panels to bring down their electricity bill, and then they were going to install a heat pump, but now they are going to do neither, because the first bit was reducing their electricity bills. Householders need a joined-up approach, because not everybody has access to cheap fuel. That is a key issue.

I thought that the minister was going to intervene on the point about the £133 million that the Scottish Government budgeted for but failed to spend, but no. We need to support our communities—

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No, thank you. Members keep interrupting.

We need firm action. The climate emergency is not a future problem; it is a now issue. It is already damaging our rail and road infrastructure and forcing people out of their homes. We cannot afford another summer of wildfires in southern Europe or to have another incident such as the

one in Saudi Arabia just weeks ago in which 1,300 people tragically died from extreme heat.

I am delighted that the SNP has adopted many of Labour's ideas wholesale in its recent election promises. I just thought that the First Minister might have been here to tell us what he is going to do but, sadly, he is not. We had announced many of those proposals days before.

I go back to my point that words are not enough; we need to do things. In 2017, the SNP Government pledged to set up a publicly owned energy company, which of course has never happened. With Labour's plan for GB energy, which would be headquartered in Scotland, we now have a real opportunity to build on our renewables success to bring down bills for Scottish people, provide energy security and ramp up our progress to net zero.

Ministers say regularly that they are keen to work with the incoming Westminster Government to ensure collaboration across the United Kingdom. That needs to happen now, because it is not acceptable just to always blame the Tory Government. I have blamed it for a lot, but a lot of what it is blamed for are SNP failures of government. The status quo is not enough. The Parliament needs to start with the publication of a new climate bill, followed by immediate publication of the climate change plan. That has been talked about for weeks now, but we still have no information on it. Let us get on with the change that we need. The current inaction is not good enough.

The Scottish Parliament has powers to make positive changes and to become true world leaders, not just world-leading talkers, in this area. However, we need immediate action to make that a reality. Let us get on with it.

I move amendment S6M-13759.2, to insert at end:

“; notes that the Scottish Government is still to legislate after announcing that the Scottish Ministers planned to scrap Scotland's legal climate targets, and regrets that Scotland's ambitious legal targets were not backed up by ambitious action from the Scottish Government, despite consistent cross-party support in the Parliament and the Climate Change Committee's belief that reaching the targets was previously achievable.”

16:13

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Fifteen years ago, Scotland set legally binding climate targets. The goal was to achieve a step change in emission cuts and to become a world leader on climate policy. However, in truth, Scotland's emissions were slowly coming down before the act, and they continued on pretty much the same trajectory. Apart from renewable electricity, in

pretty much every other sector, we have seen emissions broadly flatlining or reducing so modestly that it made very little difference. How we use energy, as well as transport policy, land use policy and more, should have seen ambitious policy change to drive down emissions from other sectors. That did not happen. As a result, Scotland is now years behind where we should be.

Although we will support the Labour amendment, it is questionable to refer to “consistent cross-party support” for ambitious action. In fact, cross-party support has often been lacking for the policy change that is needed.

Road traffic emissions will not come down without price playing its part in demand management. Land-use emissions will not come down without fundamental changes to what food we produce and how we subsidise it. Heating emissions will not come down without an ambitious programme to get us off the gas grid and to face down the lobbyists for the status quo—as well as those in the Parliament who have seemed determined to water down the heat in buildings programme.

We are also being held back by the false but prevalent idea that the market must lead the transition, or indeed that the fossil fuel industry should itself be allowed to determine the timescale for action. Let us be clear about the fossil fuel industry's track record. It has known about the harm that it was doing since the 1950s. There were decades of cover-up, followed by decades of deliberate propaganda to create a climate denial conspiracy movement. Nowadays, most oil and gas companies have moved away from denial toward delay: “We need a transition, but please make it slower.” It is like Augustine's prayer: “Lord, grant me chastity but, please, Lord, not yet.”

There was a time when the world could have made the transition slowly, but that time was decades ago; we are long past that point now. By most estimates, around two thirds of oil and gas reserves must stay in the ground. That means that investment in fossil fuel supply must decline dramatically now and in the years ahead. What are the fossil fuel giants doing now, however? They have generated truly vast profits. BP's profits were nearly \$28 billion in 2022 and nearly \$14 billion the year after. Shell raked in \$40 billion and \$28 billion in the same years. Yet both companies' investment in clean energy has flatlined, and both have doubled down on new fossil fuel investment.

Monica Lennon: Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I will take one intervention if there is time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you the time back.

Monica Lennon: The member is making some really important points, but we are here to talk about action that the Scottish Government can take in Scotland. Does he agree with me and many others that the Scottish Government should join the Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance, and that it should do so quickly?

Patrick Harvie: That is something that the Greens have advocated for persistently, and we continue to do so.

The International Energy Agency has stated:

“For the moment the oil and gas industry as a whole is a marginal force in the world’s transition to a clean energy system.”

In fact, that industry accounts for

“only 1% of total clean energy investment globally.”

It is no longer just the Greens and the climate movement who are calling out the fossil fuel industry for its dishonesty and for the harm that it continues to do. As well as the International Energy Agency, the secretary general of the United Nations and a host of other authoritative global voices have been clear.

As for a new climate bill here in Scotland, I have to say that, if it is seen as just a technical fix to get the Government out of a legal hole, I fear that the second half of this journey will be just as sluggish as the first, and we will fail. Instead, the bill must be seen as a pivotal moment, locking in the bold policy changes that are needed to get us back on track and get to net zero by 2045. We still have time, but only just.

I move amendment S6M-13759.1, to insert after “transition”:

“recognises that this is currently not happening at the pace required by climate science, and that Scotland’s emission cuts since targets were first set have been inadequate; believes that significant policy change is required to achieve emission cuts, especially in transport, land use and heating; agrees with the UN Secretary General’s description of fossil fuel companies as ‘the godfathers of climate chaos’; further agrees that investment in new fossil fuel production and infrastructure cannot be justified”.

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

16:18

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): There is no doubt that we are discussing one of the most important issues facing all of us in society today. Global climate change is moving at an alarming rate and, if it is not addressed now, it will have a catastrophic effect on future generations. In reality, we have globally and collectively hidden our heads in the sand over what is happening, and we are now running to

catch up. That is why I am pleased that the Scottish Government is committed to a green future and is investing in growing the green economy to deliver a world-leading just transition to net zero.

Action to address the scale and pace of the emergency is an environmental imperative, a moral necessity, an economic opportunity and a top priority for the Scottish Government. The problem is that both Labour and the Tories are backtracking on serious climate policy and investment, jeopardising the just transition and the race to net zero. That is a shame for everyone, because the issue should really be above political point scoring. Scotland’s First Minister has said that fighting the climate crisis cannot be allowed to descend into a typical political fight and has made it clear that it demands unity and consensus across our politics.

The First Minister has set out plans for an annual £28 billion green investment to grow the economy, protect jobs and invest in the domestic supply chain. Scotland was one of the first countries to declare a climate emergency, and our net zero target is among the world’s most ambitious. However, if the UK Government could at least match the £500 million north-east transition fund that is being delivered by the Scottish Government, that would be a huge step forward, as would speedy deployment of the Acorn project and the Scottish Cluster for carbon capture, utilisation and storage, which are crucial.

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member take an intervention?

Rona Mackay: No, I will not, thank you.

I agree with the section in the Green motion that quotes the UN secretary general’s description of fossil fuel companies as the “godfathers of climate chaos”. We must move away from them, and quickly. A just transition for Grangemouth is imperative, and plans are under way to upskill its workers to deliver new green industries to secure the site for the long term. We need to take an evidence-based approach to oil and gas through robust climate compatibility assessments before issuing any new coal licences.

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member give way?

Rona Mackay: No, thank you.

The Tory preference for nuclear energy is simply a non-starter. Scotland has an abundance of renewable power due to its amazing natural resources, and as a small nation we are now realising its benefits. Scotland, a nation of barely 6 million people, generates enough electricity for 25 million citizens every day, but it is transferred to England and sold back to Scottish consumers, who are then charged the highest prices in Europe

to use their own energy. In what world is that fair or even sensible? If Keir Starmer becomes the next Prime Minister, as looks likely, he should really step up and recommit to the £28 billion green investment that was disgracefully scrapped, to achieve net zero.

This is the biggest issue that will face every generation on this planet for decades, if not centuries, to come—everybody knows that. Scotland has shown early and sustained leadership in meeting our climate responsibilities, but we could make a much greater contribution to global climate action were we not reliant on poor decisions made by the UK Government and if we were able to work together and have the support that we need.

16:22

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):

I start by welcoming last week's news that Scotland's emissions are now more than 50 per cent below their 1990 level. It is important that we celebrate success, because it shows the public that climate action works, and they need to see whether they are to have the trust in climate policy that has been set out on their behalf.

When climate policy fails, however, there needs to be honesty. The public need to understand what has gone wrong, who is taking responsibility and what will be done to get things back on track. If not, ministers risk destroying the public's trust in climate action. When the trust goes, so does our ability to take the big decisions that are needed to get us to net zero by 2045.

It is therefore extremely worrying to see the Scottish National Party Government continuing to resort to excuses, spin and outright political attacks to disguise its failures. Let me be clear: the responsibility lies with the Scottish Government. Just last week, the SNP confirmed that it had missed its annual emissions target again—the ninth time out of the past 13 for anyone who is still keeping count. Not that we will be able to keep counting, as the SNP, rather than trying to meet the targets, is scrapping them instead.

Earlier, I suggested that the repeated failure and attempt to blame others risked eroding public trust in climate action. I even suggested an independent environmental court to improve accountability without more party politics. In response, I heard a tirade about the Prime Minister, English coal mines and recycling bins. That inability to acknowledge its shortcomings, to accept that it does not have all the answers and to listen to advice has become the hallmark of the SNP Government.

It would be easy for me to stand here and list the SNP Government's mounting environmental

failures, so I shall. As we have heard, the SNP has missed its legally binding emissions targets on nine out of the past 13 occasions, but it has also abandoned the critical 2030 net zero target. It has delayed the next climate change plan. It has been referred to Environmental Standards Scotland for breaching the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. It has missed its renewable heat target. It has missed the majority of its international biodiversity targets. It has not kept its promise to restore 20,000 hectares of peatland each year. It has overseen a decline in commuting by public transport. It has missed its active travel target for bike journeys.

Gillian Martin: Will Maurice Golden take a brief intervention?

Maurice Golden: I will be happy to, once I have finished listing the Scottish Government's failures.

The Government has still not managed to deliver on its 2013 household recycling target. It has failed to recycle more than 5 per cent of plastic waste in Scotland. It has turned a widely supported deposit return scheme into a rolling disaster. It has admitted that its food waste target is likely to fail. It has failed to introduce a landfill ban, as it promised to do in 2021. It has turned Scotland into the ashtray of Europe, with municipal incineration capacity up sevenfold.

I am happy to give way to the minister.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must be very brief, minister.

Gillian Martin: It is one thing to read out a list of targets, but in the spirit of working together to achieve the goals that will get us to net zero, does Maurice Golden recognise that we need more investment in the action? That will come only if the UK Government attaches a similar amount of priority to reaching net zero as this Parliament has done.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to wind up, Mr Golden.

Maurice Golden: I think that the Scottish Government's proven track record of failure proves that the problem is not money but the policy makers themselves. That is why, as a Parliament, we need to get together and ensure that we are tackling the climate emergency, because the Scottish Government certainly does not appear to care about that.

16:27

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Such is the seriousness of the global climate emergency that it can often be overwhelming and demoralising to think about what to do about it. However, if, collectively, we

continue to think global and act local, we can make a meaningful difference, as years past have shown.

I am of the firm view that, together, we can make progress on the issue only if we have a positive discussion about it. Yes, we must be realistic, honest and practical, but we must be positive. As a Parliament, we have indicated on several occasions that we all care about the issue and are committed to tackling it. Given that we share the same objective, we need to think about what we can do to work collectively for the benefit of our constituents.

In this Parliament, we hear evidence from experts all the time. Sometimes, it really sticks with you when you hear someone speak at a committee or in another forum. At the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's meeting on 23 April this year, Chris Stark made his last appearance as chair of the Climate Change Committee. That evidence was extremely compelling, and I would like to repeat a number of the things that he said that day.

One of his key points was this:

"The benefits to this country of achieving net zero are immense—not just to the climate but in the form of jobs, to the landscape around us, to trade and to a host of social issues. Those reasons, alongside the climate benefits, are why you should want to pursue net zero."

He also said:

"The transition is good for the climate, good for the economy and good for people living in this country."—*[Official Report, Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, 23 April 2024; c 47, 48.]*

For me and my constituency, that applies in a number of different ways, every week and every day. Nova Innovation is developing some of the most remarkable tidal technology in the world and, in doing so, is growing as a business, and it was recently announced that Vestas, a world-leading blade maker, has begun the process of securing planning permission for a site at Leith docks in Edinburgh. During this week of wind energy, it is worth noting that that development will create new jobs and will play a huge part in the remarkable contribution that Scotland can make to wind energy, to the benefit of us and people elsewhere.

Low-emission zones are already making a difference. Clean air day last week was important in reminding us as a society that, in Scotland, there have been 1,700 premature deaths due to pollution, which is the leading cause of preventable ill health in Scotland.

Those are all reasons for achieving net zero and tackling the climate emergency. I go back to the words of Chris Stark, who said:

"I am increasingly of the view that, if we are going to get to net zero by 2045, we probably will not do so by making

the arguments solely on a climate basis. For example, it is jobs in Falkirk that should drive the investments to decarbonise Grangemouth, and the fact that that also helps the climate should be a secondary reinforcing concern. Similarly, the fact that we are making homes warmer and reducing energy bills is the reason why we want to make the investment in buildings, and the fact that it helps the climate is a reinforcing aspect.

I am happy for net zero to step into that reinforcing secondary role. We still have to get to net zero—it is very important that we do that—but we have been through quite an odd period, frankly, where the primary reason for a lot of what was being done was net zero alone, and that is a strategy that probably does not have that much longer to run."—*[Official Report, Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, 23 April 2024; c 35.]*

The benefits of net zero are widespread, so I am very pleased that the Government remains committed to achieving net zero by 2045 and all the benefits that it will bring.

16:31

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I take the opportunity to extend my best wishes to the cabinet secretary as she is about to embark on maternity leave. I look forward to continuing to work with Ms Martin and to working with Dr Allan when he takes up his post.

The motion is right to ask the Parliament to reaffirm our collective

"commitment to tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss through a just and fair transition".

Very few people in Scotland would disagree with that.

We have had really helpful briefings, including those from Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, Uplift and the Scottish Rewilding Alliance.

Tackling the climate emergency is an era-defining challenge, and all politicians and Governments have a moral responsibility to act. We cannot slow down or lose courage. However, as colleagues have said—and as, I think, the Government recognises—the Government has been struggling to turn ambition into action. We have heard about its failure to meet legal targets, which is important. Sarah Boyack set out that the Government's new climate bill must be introduced—we cannot have any more delay—and it must be backed up by a climate change plan.

Dr Shivali Fifield, from the Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland, has said:

"To the Government we say: show us your homework. Too many times, you have overpromised and underdelivered, and in a climate emergency, the stakes are too high for wishful thinking."

We agree that the failure to meet targets is not the only case of the Government failing. Many people, including from the Climate Change

Committee, have said that there has been an absence of climate policy.

I agree with Transform Scotland that the Scottish Government's commitment to cut car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030 is to be commended, but we are now three years on from that commitment being made, with no real plan in place. That is not good enough. I hope that we will have answers on when the route map for reducing car kilometres by 20 per cent will be published and on what policy measures it will contain.

Gillian Martin: Does Monica Lennon recognise the significance of the ScotWind auction round being the largest of its type in the world? The Scottish Government and Crown Estate Scotland have done that, which is a significant step in decarbonising our energy supply not just for Scotland but for the whole of the UK.

Monica Lennon: I was talking about transport but, on ScotWind, I hear concerns that Scotland's sea bed has been sold off far too cheaply. We can have another debate about that.

I go back to my point about transport. What additional policies will be introduced to support the expansion of train, tram and bus services? I might steal some of Graham Simpson's lines, but when we discussed the issue at the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, there was real concern about bus deserts—areas where people young and old have a free bus pass but there are no buses to get on. More and more councils across the country are cutting back on school transport because they do not have the budget, including in Lanarkshire, which is affecting my constituents. We need the Government to get real on that.

I agree with Uplift's call regarding workforce. To achieve a just transition, the Government needs to urgently deliver a coherent transition plan for workers, or we will risk situations such as those that exist in Grangemouth right now occurring around the country.

I will bring my remarks to a close. Lord Deben, the outgoing chair of the Climate Change Committee, said:

"Our children will not forgive us if we leave them a world of withering heat and devastating storms where sea level rises and extreme temperatures force millions to move because their countries are no longer habitable. None of us can avoid our responsibility. Delay is not an option."

I agree with that. Scottish Labour stands ready to work with the Scottish Government where necessary, and we will push it to be bolder at all times.

16:36

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I welcome the Scottish Government

reaffirming its commitment to tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. All too often, tackling climate change is seen as something that Governments can concern themselves with when things are all rosy, when finances are in abundance and when life feels easy. However, we cannot afford to think like that, because the impact of the climate emergency is exacerbating existing inequalities for people all over the world, and especially for people who have not contributed to climate change.

Scotland has continually shown early and sustained leadership in meeting our climate responsibilities. It was one of the first countries to declare a climate emergency and set an ambitious 2045 net zero target. We have already achieved the largest reduction in emissions of any nation in the UK, and statistics show that we are halfway to net zero and decarbonising faster than the EU 27 average. Electricity supply emissions have fallen by 88.1 per cent, industrial emissions by 56.8 per cent and waste management emissions by 75.4 per cent from the baseline.

Scotland created 63 per cent of new woodland in the UK between 2022 and 2023, which is more than all the other UK nations combined. Although Labour and the Tories are backtracking on serious climate policy and investment, which is jeopardising the just transition and the race to net zero, the Scottish Government is attracting international investment to grow the green economy and create skilled jobs. In her opening comments, the minister referred to investments by Sumitomo Corporation in the offshore wind sector, creating around 330 jobs and bringing £350 million of inward investment to Scotland, and by Haventus in regenerating Ardersier port, which has the potential to create 3,000 jobs and reskilling opportunities. That demonstrates the SNP Government's ambition for Scotland's green economy.

In my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency, I joined the local bus company, McGill's Bus Services, to celebrate its milestone of reaching 10 million zero-emission miles. Thanks to continual investment by McGill's, its net zero fleet has grown to more than 110 electric buses, which have prevented 11,270 tonnes of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere.

Sarah Boyack: Bus companies are doing some fantastic work—Lothian Buses in Edinburgh is doing similar work. However, the key issue is that we simply do not have enough bus services for people to use—we have lost hundreds. We are not seeing the results of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, which should have improved the number of bus services in the country.

Stuart McMillan: I will come on to that point, because that is where planning is really important.

To go back to the point about McGill's, the reduction is equivalent to planting around 1.3 million trees in an area the size of 2,784 football pitches.

The Tories treat net zero as a burden—Chris Skidmore, the former energy minister, is planning to vote against the Tories next week due to their abandonment of climate pledges and dismissal of the economic opportunities of net zero—and Labour has abandoned its £28 billion green investment pledge. The damaging decision to cut energy investment will destroy Scottish jobs and harm economic growth.

I come to my point about planning. The Transport Scotland briefing that Monica Lennon touched on is very helpful. It says that to reduce transport emissions, we must see a modal shift away from private car use. That is where planning is hugely important. Local authorities and planning authorities need to fully consider that issue when assessing housing applications. That includes Inverclyde Council in relation to the redevelopment of the former Inverkip power station site. Sadly, if that goes ahead, the development will rely solely on private car use. There will be no buses and there will be no access to trains—only private car use. That will destroy the economy in the western part of Inverclyde.

I will not stand here and take lessons from Labour and the Tories on climate. I truly believe that Scotland could make an even greater contribution to global climate action if we were not reliant on decisions made elsewhere.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise the chamber that the time that we had in hand has pretty much been exhausted, so members will have to stick to their time limit allocation.

16:40

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I wonder why you made that announcement just before I started speaking.

I am delighted to be speaking on the climate change crisis that we face. I do not want to spend my time blaming everyone else; I want to identify some of the problems that we face in reaching our net zero target by 2045.

As we rely on increasing amounts of electrification across Scotland, and not only from offshore and onshore wind, there are various things that we have to come to terms with, one of which is the increased amount of power lines and battery stations that we will need to have across Scotland. Only the other day, I was speaking to Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks about what is required. Of course, it does not tell us that,

because it works to a 10-year plan and it does not make clear what is required in local communities. However, its answer was that, in 2045, the Beaully to Denny power line, which stretches through the middle of the Cairngorms national park, will have not one line, but four.

That is a major problem in remote and rural areas across Scotland where there are no power lines. They might face one or two power lines down the track, but there is only a certain amount of community benefit that communities will accept. Only a certain number of village halls can be built as a result of the benefit from wind farms and electricity companies. We need a bit more honesty from the transmission companies. My inbox is full of emails from people across the Highlands complaining about the arrogance of SSEN, which turns up demanding that power lines be put in but is not clear about what will be required.

I believe that the Government has a role in striking the balance of achieving net zero and getting SSEN to speak more constructively to communities.

Gillian Martin: I am glad that Mr Mountain has raised that. Will he support me in the calls that I have made in the past year to ensure not only that community engagement and community benefit are made mandatory by the UK Government, but that codes of practice are associated with both things?

Edward Mountain: I do not think that it is necessary for the UK Government to step in and do that.

Gillian Martin: [*Inaudible.*]

Edward Mountain: The minister asked for an answer, so she should let me answer and not barrack me from a sedentary position.

I do not believe that it is up to the UK Government to do that. SSEN should step up to the plate and deal with communities properly.

Turning to other ways of dealing with our problem, I note that we could be generating more electricity than we are at the moment by using hydrogen. At times when we are generating power and it is not being used, hydrogen is also a very good way of storing that power. I accept that the UK Government has a role in that. For example, it could ask electricity companies to ensure that 20 per cent of the electricity that is used is generated from hydrogen. We could also use more hydro-treated vegetable oil to allow vehicles to run on non-fossil fuels and older cars to be allowed into low-emission zones.

I support the electric vehicle infrastructure fund that the Government announced last year. It has to deliver more charging points by 2026. The Government will say that we have more charging

points per head than anywhere else in the UK, but that makes no difference if there is not one in a person's locality. The Government promised £30 million for that, and it was to generate £30 million from private investment. However, I have not seen the £30 million from the Government and I have heard no news of the £30 million from private investment. Perhaps the minister could address that when she sums up.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final speaker in the open debate is John Mason. You have up to four minutes, Mr Mason.

16:45

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Thank you for the opportunity to speak in the debate, Deputy Presiding Officer.

We can be positive about a lot that has already happened. We have seen a tremendous growth in wind power and other forms of renewable electricity generation, and I understand that electricity supply emissions have fallen by 88 per cent, industrial emissions by 56 per cent and waste management emissions by 75 per cent. However, we all accept that we have further to go.

Transform Scotland points out in its briefing that transport is the largest source of climate emissions in Scotland. That was probably not helped by all the fans going to the Euros. However, it is a little simplistic to say that this is a devolved area and that Scotland can boost public transport and take similar measures all by itself. The Scottish Fiscal Commission, in its report "Fiscal Sustainability Perspectives: Climate Change", which was published in March, emphasises the interrelationship between the actions of the UK Government and those of the Scottish Government. It points out that, although Scotland

"controls most public spending on Surface Transport ... many aspects of its regulation are reserved",

including

"banning polluting vehicles or imposing more stringent emission standards."

In addition, Scottish funding is very much linked to Westminster, be it our resource funding, which largely comes from the block grant, or the capital funding, which has been cut lately.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

John Mason: I will if it is very short.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please be brief, Mr Harvie.

Patrick Harvie: The member is right about some of those restrictions, but it is a matter of fact that, for many years, successive Scottish

Governments have prioritised the building of high-carbon infrastructure such as roads instead of investing in low-carbon infrastructure.

John Mason: I will take that as a statement and leave it in the air.

Scotland is dependent to a large extent—

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Will the member give way?

John Mason: I am sorry, but I do not have time. If I give way again, Mr McArthur will get me.

Scotland is dependent to a large extent on the UK, especially in relation to funding, while the UK is also dependent on Scotland to meet its targets, not least because we have so much more land per head of population. We have 32 per cent of the total UK land mass, roughly half of the trees and 70 per cent of the peatland. The Climate Change Committee estimates that 30 per cent of UK-wide costs that are associated with land use, land use change and forestry are assigned to Scotland. Therefore, the UK insisting strictly on using the Barnett formula for the funding that is required to reach net zero is not going to cut it for either Scotland or the UK.

I have a few comments on the Conservative amendment. The Conservatives have picked up the phrase "anti-science", which I think came from Tom Greatrex of the Nuclear Industry Association, who is a former Labour MP. However, that is a nonsense phrase in this context. Science is very good at telling us how nuclear power works—and even how nuclear weapons work, for that matter. We might note in passing that, thus far, science has not told us what to do with nuclear waste. However, science cannot possibly tell us whether nuclear power is a good thing or a bad thing. That is not science's job and, in fact, it is totally unable to make that distinction.

It is human beings who have to weigh up the evidence from science, the evidence concerning the economics and the evidence concerning the environment. We should absolutely consider the science on a wide range of questions that we face but, at the end of the day, it is human beings who have to make moral judgments as to what is the right and wise way to go. That is beyond the scope of science—and, for that matter, of artificial intelligence.

In the interest of balance, I will pick up on a phrase in the Green amendment, which says that fossil fuel companies are the "godfathers of climate chaos". I think that that slightly overstates the case. Fossil fuels have been a tremendous boon to our society and we have all gained from progress made through the industrial revolution and since then. However, just as we moved from coal to oil and gas, we are now moving away to

cleaner, renewable energy. I think that we all broadly agree that that is the right way to go. Where we probably disagree a bit is on how fast we can and should make that move. We certainly need to get the balance right as regards the speed of that move.

In conclusion, we all agree on the need to tackle climate change and I think that we are all committed to reaching net zero, so we should all be able to support the Government motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:49

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I join other members in giving my best wishes to the cabinet secretary. I, too, am looking forward to working with Dr Allan in the months ahead.

The minister asked us at the beginning of the debate to recommit to the declaration of the climate emergency and I am happy to do that. Of course, I am happy to celebrate the work that was done in the Sturgeon era on climate justice, particularly the whole debate about loss and damage at the 26th UN climate change conference of the parties—COP26—and the commitments that were made there.

However, the minister has to acknowledge that the debt that Scotland owes to countries that are not responsible for climate change but are now bearing the brunt of the crisis is now spiralling out of control. It is many orders of magnitude beyond what the Scottish Government put on the table for the loss and damage fund at COP26. That should inspire us to take more meaningful action to reduce our emissions and meet our global obligations.

The minister went on to challenge the chamber to back action, which I absolutely agree with. However, I also ask the Scottish Government to reflect on how we have got to the point at which the 75 per cent target has had to be dropped.

In 2020, as Sarah Boyack mentioned, the UK CCC wrote to the Scottish Government and identified a range of areas that the Government had to move on then—not now, but then—in order to get anywhere close to meeting that target. One of those areas was heat pumps, which is within the Scottish Government's devolved responsibilities, and it could have acted on it then. The reality is that the climate plan that came on the back of that target was not fit for purpose, as numerous parliamentary committees told the Government. However, the Government did not make the necessary changes that were needed. I

hope that the Government recognises and learns from that experience.

The minister went on to mention the UK Government's cut to capital infrastructure funds. She is absolutely right that those cuts have been devastating. When we talk about the interests of members around the chamber—solar panels for Sarah Boyack, tree planting for Edward Mountain, bus infrastructure for Alex Rowley, EV charging points for Douglas Lumsden—we see that they all require capital infrastructure and for us to build our way out of climate change.

Michelle Thomson: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Ruskell: I think that I am a bit short of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have time for a brief intervention.

Michelle Thomson: I will be brief. With reference to the fiscal sustainability report, I want to bring to the chamber's attention that the UK's debt to gross domestic product ratio is about 98 per cent, and it would be 289 per cent without mitigation. Reflecting on those kinds of figures, it seems utterly astounding that the Scottish Government is receiving a 20 per cent cut in capital expenditure over the next five years.

Mark Ruskell: That point stands up and it reinforces what I am saying. The question is for a new Labour Government—and we will be backing the Labour amendment in the debate. However, if the party cuts its net zero commitment from £28 billion to £5 billion, that would leave us in a poor state. Reflecting on Labour's manifesto, Greenpeace said:

"You can't deliver real change with spare change".

We absolutely need infrastructure, which I know that the Tories do not always like. They do not like transmission lines or wind farms. They love nuclear, but Mr Lumsden cannot say whether he would love nuclear if it was in his backyard. We need to get serious about what is needed.

Patrick Harvie summed it up well when he talked about the new climate bill being a pivotal moment where we need to take bold policy choices. I ask the Government to double down on what we were starting to achieve collectively through the Bute house agreement and not to roll back on the initiatives that were started. I ask the Government to resist pressure within its own party and perhaps among those who are not speaking in the debate who want to see certain policies rolled back.

We are absolutely on the right track with heat in buildings—it is a template for the rest of the UK, and we should be doubling down on the work of

Patrick Harvie when he was in Government and delivering on that, just as we will be doubling down this afternoon on the work of Lorna Slater with the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill. When it comes to the onshore wind sector deal and the vehicle mileage reduction plan, we need to be raising revenue to reinvest in public transport so that we can deliver safer communities. We need the Government to raise its ambition. As Ben Macpherson spelled out in his speech, we need to see climate co-benefits being delivered alongside climate change, and we need to make people's lives easier, not harder, in tackling the crisis. That is what the Government needs to do: it needs to double down. We will be backing those actions and those policies in the chamber.

16:54

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): In closing on behalf of Labour, I wish the cabinet secretary the very best for her maternity leave.

Both Labour speakers, Sarah Boyack and Monica Lennon, made the point that, if we are serious about tackling the climate emergency, we need to begin by working together across the Parliament. Sadly, even in the speeches in this debate, that has not been the case.

Labour was last in power at the UK level in 2010, and in this Parliament in 2007, and yet a number of SNP members have, today, attacked Labour for somehow being responsible for the Scottish Government's failures to reach its targets. For me, that signifies the problem in this Parliament. Those who first created the Parliament envisaged a place where, even through the way that it is laid out, politicians would come together and work together. There may be an election next week, but this debate is typical of the debates that we have in the Parliament. It is no wonder that the people of Scotland are quite fed up of it. They often ask questions about what we achieve in here, although I have to say that there have been many achievements.

I agree with what Maurice Golden said when he talked about the damage to public trust. There is an inability to acknowledge the shortcomings of certain policies, and we have to be able to do that. A few members in the chamber today have talked about transport. A few weeks ago, when the cabinet secretary made her statement about reductions—and the fact that we seem to be dumping the targets—I made a couple of points.

With regard to the first, Stuart McMillan talked earlier about the early successes. One of the biggest reasons for those early successes was more to do with Scottish Power than with the Scottish Government. When Scottish Power decided to close Longannet, there was, overnight,

a massive reduction in the emissions from there. In fact, there has been very little progress after that, and that is where we need to make progress.

Secondly, as Mark Ruskell said, transport is the largest source of climate emissions in Scotland, at 36 per cent. However, the failure to join up government, which I level—fairly, I think—at this Government, is, in my view, one of the major issues. The Government says that it will cut car kilometres by 20 per cent—that is a target, although it might not remain one, given the Government's record.

However, the fact is that if we look at the policies around that, we see that there is no joined-up thinking and no joined-up strategy. There has been the bus partnership fund, which was welcomed. However, we know that if we are serious about getting people to leave their cars at home, public transport has to be affordable, accessible and reliable.

I hear what Patrick Harvie and John Mason said earlier about capital, and cuts to capital investment. However, we can look to Greater Manchester, and what has been achieved there, where they have gone for bus franchising. It is about giving control over buses back to public organisations, which can then set out the bus routes—

Mark Ruskell: Will the member give way?

Alex Rowley: I do not have enough time—sorry.

They can set out the bus routes that will be available, so that bus companies in Greater Manchester can bid for a collective of routes. In Scotland, however, we have the situation that we saw in West Lothian with the company that was mentioned earlier. Where the company thinks that there is not enough profit in bus routes, they simply pull those routes. That becomes part of the problem.

Earlier, the cabinet secretary was critical of Labour for not supporting the workplace parking levy. The reason that we do not support the workplace parking levy is that we think that it is ill thought through and ill considered, and we think that it would actually put people out of work. I do not know whether ministers and other members in the chamber have ever actually tried using public transport, but I have constituents who talk to me regularly about it. Some have been offered jobs and were not able to take them, because the public transport could not get them there. They were then threatened with having their benefits removed and so on.

As I said, we have to be more imaginative than the Scottish Government has been. We need to look at peak fares—the pilot was a good move and

we need to continue with that policy. We also need to look at flat fares, because a lot of people cannot afford to use the buses.

In summing up, let us dump this constant barrage of fighting in the chamber, and find ways to work together, rather than always trying to score political points—as we have seen, I have to say, from the SNP today. It is not good enough, and it lets the people of Scotland down.

16:59

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I also wish Màiri McAllan the very best of luck as she leaves to have her baby and I look forward to working with the other ministers in their new roles.

Alex Rowley calls for us all to work together. I agree with him that we should work together, because there is a lot of consensus on the issue. However, in order to agree on that, we have to agree on what the problem is.

The Government has tried to tell us that tackling the climate emergency is one of its top priorities, but it could have fooled me. Yesterday, Parliament rejected a series of amendments to the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill—and would have rejected others, had they been moved—that would have meant real change in the way in which we deal with goods and waste, and that does not show that the Government is serious about the issue.

Just last week, the Scottish Government revealed in its own report that it has, yet again, missed its legally binding targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions. That failure is not a one-off but part of a pattern that has lasted for the past decade. Maurice Golden listed a number of failures, so he saved me the trouble of doing the same.

How can Parliament—or, indeed, the Scottish public—believe that the Government is prioritising the climate emergency when, as a number of members have pointed out, it has missed nine of its past 13 climate targets? Not only that, just months ago, in an admission of that failure, the SNP Government scrapped its target of reducing emissions by 75 per cent by 2030.

When Nicola Sturgeon announced Scotland's climate change targets in 2019, she boasted that Scotland had the

“most stretching targets in the world”.

They proved to be too stretching for the SNP Government.

Domestic transport accounts for the largest share of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland, at 28.3 per cent in 2022, which was up from 26.2 per cent the year before. Emissions from international shipping and aviation have almost doubled in the

past year. Those figures are heading in the wrong direction.

The Greens' answer to transport emissions is to tax motorists even more, through nasty road charging schemes. We have yet to hear what the SNP has in store for us, perhaps because it fears a voter backlash. Where is that plan to cut car miles? We have yet to see it and we do not know when we are going to see it.

The SNP Government is always quick to blame Westminster for anything. It says that the Scottish Parliament lacks responsibility for energy and that it needs more capital investment to deliver net zero.

In September, Humza Yousaf called Westminster rolling back on its climate pledges “unforgivable” and vowed that Scotland would

“continue to show global leadership in the face of the climate crisis”.

However, we have yet to see that, and pointing the finger of blame south of the border is not going to save the planet.

Màiri McAllan: In what way does decarbonising faster than the rest of the UK and the EU27 not demonstrate global leadership on emissions reduction?

Graham Simpson: In what way does missing nine of the past 13 targets demonstrate it? It does not demonstrate it at all.

We need to get real—Scotland's record is not good. We need pragmatic plans that bring people with us on the journey to net zero. Douglas Lumsden's speech was all about plans, but we do not have them from the Government.

The Climate Change Committee's damning report was published in March. It should have been a wake-up call for the Scottish Government, because it found that the Scottish Government has failed to achieve its ambitious climate goals yet again, that the publication of the draft climate change plan has been delayed yet again, and that

“Most key indicators of delivery progress ... are off track”

yet again. Most concerning of all, the committee said that

“there is ... no comprehensive delivery strategy”

from the Scottish Government. No wonder its actions continue to fall short of its legal requirements.

I mentioned transport. I am very keen to know when we might see a route map for the Government's plan to deliver 24,000 EV charge points by 2030. I would also like to know when we will see an integrated ticketing system for our public transport network, to get more people using

public transport. We have been promised that for well over a decade, but there is no sign of it.

Our amendment also calls on the Scottish Government to

“reverse its anti-science approach to new nuclear technology”.

When I asked the—

Clare Haughey: Will the member take an intervention?

Graham Simpson: I have no time, I am afraid.

When I asked the First Minister about that last week, he told me that the Government does not support new nuclear power stations because they are more expensive. He failed to mention that renewable energy is far less reliable than nuclear, with wind available only 45 per cent of the time and requiring back-up from gas.

Now that the annual targets are being scrapped, such debates will become less frequent but, Presiding Officer, I sincerely hope that we will not be back in this position in 2045—well, you and I will not be. If tackling the climate emergency is really a priority for the Government, it needs to take responsibility and take action.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Simpson. I will check my diary for 2045.

I join other members in wishing the cabinet secretary all the best for her maternity leave. In the meantime, I invite her to wind up the debate. You have a generous eight minutes, cabinet secretary.

17:06

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy (Màiri McAllan): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer, and I thank all members who have passed on their kind wishes.

I am really pleased to close the debate, which is the fourth in the Government’s series exploring the First Minister’s top priorities for the Government that he leads. As Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy for one more day, I am delighted that the First Minister has placed the climate and nature emergencies among his top priorities, alongside growing our economy, delivering excellent public services and eradicating child poverty.

During the time that I have worked on the matter, in a number of different roles, I have had the privilege of seeing ministers, Government officials, parliamentarians from across the chamber, communities, organisations and businesses alike work exceptionally hard to rise to the challenge before us—and it is a significant challenge.

Like every country that is dedicated to this journey, we are, naturally, grappling with the scale and complexity of the challenge. As such, the work that we have undertaken has been actively iterative. Scotland has both led the way and learned as we have gone along. In that time, we have achieved so much of which I am proud. I am pleased that members across the chamber have highlighted some of those successes today. My colleague Gillian Martin kicked us off in that regard, but Rona Mackay was absolutely right to highlight the transition that Scotland is on to becoming a renewables powerhouse while, at the same time, platforming the unacceptable situation of transmission charges that we continue to face.

I am also pleased that my colleague Ben Macpherson raised the important link between air pollution and ill health, which I am very passionate about solving, and that he spoke of the development of four low-emission zones in that regard. I am also pleased that, in the past number of years, we have seen all the air quality monitoring sites in Scotland meet their objectives for the first time outside a lockdown period. That is undoubtedly having an impact on Scotland’s public health, and I welcome it strongly.

I am grateful to Mark Ruskell for highlighting the work that we achieved together in government, and I look forward to continuing to work with him and his colleagues as we take forward a number of those areas.

The emissions reduction impact of much of what we have done in the past five years will not be felt until the future. That is particularly the case for our natural environment and the energy transition, but we have to act now to see results in future years. The Government continues to do that on an on-going basis, and I often talk of our acceptance that we must continually challenge ourselves in that regard.

I agree entirely with Alex Rowley that there is a need to reach consensus, and I commit myself to doing that in the chamber and with an incoming UK Government. However, I must put on record my regret that, from my experience in this role, occasionally, Scotland’s Opposition parties appear unable to recognise our nation’s successes, even as they, rightly, hold the Government to account.

I will always celebrate our success while always being clear that more needs to be done. However, Douglas Lumsden and Maurice Golden’s contributions were relentlessly negative and did not seem to accept that their own party’s record has been about standing in the way of even modest measures in the Scottish Parliament. Indeed, their party has a horrendous record in the UK Government, which is contributing to their electoral support utterly falling through the floor.

Maurice Golden: I began my speech earlier by saying that I welcomed last week's news that Scotland's emissions are now more than 50 per cent below their 1990 level. Is that being "relentlessly negative"?

Màiri McAllan: No, it is not. I am grateful to the member for putting that on the record in the first place and for repeating it now.

However, perhaps another example is that of Sarah Boyack, who I know cares deeply about the issue and has been working on it for a number of years. She was right to talk about the importance of decarbonising buildings, but she did so without speaking to, for example, our "Heat in Buildings" report for 2022-23, which highlights how, through £170 million of investment, we have helped 138,000 households through the Home Energy Scotland advice service, made the homes of more than 8,000 fuel-poor households warmer and easier to heat and installed more than 5,000 zero direct emissions heating systems.

Further, we have not talked about the new build heat standard, which my colleagues in the Greens introduced when they were in government. That is a demonstrably positive move in the decarbonisation of buildings in Scotland.

Sarah Boyack: Part of the point of the Opposition is to push the Government to go further and harder—that is why we do that. I can talk about heat networks now. We have huge opportunities in Scotland. Midlothian Council is working with Vattenfall to provide a heat network. There are big opportunities with renewables. That would also reduce people's bills. We can do that in our big cities and towns. It is about doing more and doing it fast.

Màiri McAllan: I understand that, and I share Sarah Boyack's desire for us all to work together to do more and to do it faster. However, my point is that that progress did not emerge because we wished it to; it happened because of strong political leadership, careful policy development, the prioritisation of scarce public money, and a truly cross-societal effort, to which this Government redoubles and restates its commitment today.

I again take the opportunity to highlight and thank all those who have contributed to the progress to date. In an earlier debate, the Conservatives used their motion and their precious time in our national Parliament to criticise those who are campaigning for climate action. It is distasteful and wrong to criticise those who have peacefully but bravely raised their voice in the name of action, calling for ambition from Governments, including my own.

Climate activists act for our future here in Scotland and in the UK, because they know, as

this Government does, that communities around the world are truly on the front line of climate change, losing everything up to and including their lives.

My colleague Gillian Martin spoke of much of the work that the SNP has done in recent years to support campaigners in the global south. The people—the climate activists—whom I have met on this journey do that because they have to, frankly. Many have seen utter devastation in their countries and have been forced to act, such as Brenda Mwale from Malawi, Ineza Grace from Rwanda and Salote Soqo from the Pacific, with whom I have worked. There is also my friend Elizabeth Wathuti, who is a Kenyan environment and climate activist and an incredible woman. In addition, there are the women whom I will not name but with whom I have worked on our human rights defender programme, who have risked so much to lead the way on gender and the environment.

Presiding Officer, as politicians, we are often asked who our heroes are. Those activists—those women—are my heroes.

All that work, in Scotland and internationally, is precisely because we fulsomely accept climate science and expert advice that tells us that the impacts of human-caused climate change will continue to intensify.

Maurice Golden: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Monica Lennon: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Màiri McAllan: Do I have any time to take those interventions, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): You must conclude, cabinet secretary.

Màiri McAllan: That is why we have deliberately framed our motion today on climate science and independent advice. I ask all members from all parties to support us in that.

I am very conscious of time, so I will conclude. I am very pleased to close today's debate. It is apt that it should be the last that I take part in for the Government before my maternity leave, but whether it is for our own children, those around the world or generations to come, we owe it to them all to stand against climate wars and climate denial and to stand for action that is capable of rising to the emergency before us.

Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-13757, in the name of Gillian Martin, on the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill at stage 3.

As members will be aware, I am required, under standing orders, to decide whether, in my view, any provision of the bill relates to a protected subject matter—that is, whether it modifies the electoral system and franchise for Scottish parliamentary elections. It is my view that no provision of the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill relates to a protected subject matter. Therefore, the bill does not require a supermajority to be passed at stage 3.

Before we move to the debate, I call the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy to signify Crown consent to the bill.

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy (Màiri McAllan): For the purposes of rule 9.11 of standing orders, I advise the Parliament that His Majesty, having been informed of the purport of the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill, has consented to place his prerogative and interests, in so far as they are affected by the bill, at the disposal of the Parliament for the purposes of the bill.

The Presiding Officer: We will move on to the debate. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

17:16

The Minister for Climate Action (Gillian Martin): I am delighted to open the stage 3 debate on the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill.

I will begin by thanking the many people who have helped us to get to this point. I thank the convener, the clerks and all the members of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee for their stage 1 report, their extensive—four-week-long—scrutiny at stage 2, and the positive debate. I also thank all the other members and stakeholders who have engaged so constructively with me, and the Finance and Public Administration Committee and the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee for their thorough considerations.

In particular, I give my thanks and gratitude to my predecessor. I hope that Lorna Slater is in the chamber to hear this, because I really want to thank her. Lorna Slater's dedication and hard work in developing the bill throughout the lead-up to stage 1 and through stage 1, and her immense contribution cannot be overstated. I thank her for her personal support to me as I took the reins at stage 2.

I also extend my heartfelt thanks to the members of the bill team for their hard work, support, expertise and tireless efforts throughout the bill process. It cannot have been easy changing ministers halfway through. That was daunting, but because of Ms Slater's thorough engagement, the cross-party working that she did and my bill team's support, I have been able to get us to this point, at which we all have the opportunity to pass a bill that we can very much be proud of.

There is real passion and enthusiasm for a circular economy. I have heard that in members' contributions and from the stakeholders whom I have met. I have also been struck by the spirit of cross-party working. We might not agree on all the methods and on what we have managed to get into the bill, but I think that we all agree that there is a real need to accelerate our efforts on the circular economy. I think that a lot of our constituents would like to see more of that type of working across the chamber and more of the consensus politics that the deliberations on the bill have exemplified.

At every stage, members have championed repair, recycle and reuse initiatives that are leading the way in their constituencies and regions and in others that they have visited. The third sector and local councils are being innovative, and there are innovative businesses. Reference to those initiatives has really helped to oil the wheels of the bill. I think that this crucial piece of legislation will be a springboard for waste managers throughout Scotland, of whatever status, to ramp up action.

Making more sustainable use of our resources in Scotland is fundamental to tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. During the passage of the bill, we have listened to feedback and, because of that, the bill is stronger in promoting action further up the waste hierarchy. I thank my colleagues for pushing the Government to put more in the bill, and particularly to refer more to reuse in the waste hierarchy and to be cognisant of the role that reuse, refill and take-back have in the whole-life carbon emissions of goods, products and materials.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): In two or three years' time, if we were to look at what difference the bill has made to anything, what would we notice?

Gillian Martin: It is my fervent hope that the bill will be a springboard for all the local waste collectors and managers throughout Scotland to come together to share best practice and to put to us increased targets that they want to achieve, particularly on household recycling. We will then know that councils in particular have their shoulders to the wheel because they have made

the decisions and we have given them the power to do so.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Gillian Martin: I want to continue. I might be able to take an intervention later.

For the first time, there will be a statutory duty to prepare a circular economy strategy and associated targets for Scotland that will embed circular thinking within Government and across future Administrations. We are all consumers, and we must play our part in reducing waste. That is why the bill is so far reaching—it impacts all of us, from the goods that we buy to what we put in our recycling bins.

Everyone in the country should experience a modern and easy-to-use recycling and waste service that helps them to do the right thing for the planet. The new powers in the bill will give ministers and local authorities the tools that they need to deliver that. That speaks to Mr Simpson's point.

I will take Ms Boyack's intervention now.

Sarah Boyack: One thing that we debated at stage 2 was the impact of fines on householders, particularly those in tenements or shared properties. I notice that that issue has come up in the press again. It would be helpful if the minister would repeat the key principles of the bill and point out that individual householders should not automatically be worried, as it is about persistent offenders and cases where local authorities can identify evidence.

Gillian Martin: Very helpfully, Ms Boyack has set out what I probably would have said in response to her question. The measure is about repeat, persistent offenders—the types of people who are a problem in many of our communities. It is not about the people who want to do the right thing but who have made a mistake; it is about people who have egregiously or deliberately contaminated recycling waste. I give my assurance on that, as I hope that I did at stage 2.

I want to talk about the voluntary code of practice that will be developed through co-design to explore opportunities to enhance activities to promote reuse and repair on a voluntary and recommended basis. The improvement programme, which is under development as an alternative to financial penalties relating to local authority recycling targets, will offer a more practical route to share best practice. We heard from members and stakeholders about so much best practice that is happening in councils in certain parts of Scotland and from which other parts of Scotland can benefit.

I believe that the co-design process is based on the principles of the Verity house agreement and the new deal for business, which is central to delivering the transformation that we need. I particularly thank Councillor Macgregor at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities for the positive and constructive discussions that she had with me and Ms Slater on the bill. I am delighted that she has cited that engagement as a fine example of working in the spirit of the Verity house agreement.

Of course, I recognise that there are concerns about the framework nature of the bill, although I hope that most of them have been addressed during the passage of the bill. However, it is important that we make enabling legislation so that action can happen at the local level involving the people who know their services best.

I will not say much more—

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to conclude, minister.

Gillian Martin: I am being asked to conclude, but I might be able to pick up some of the points that I have missed in my opening speech when I finish the debate.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill be passed.

17:23

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): In the previous debate, the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy, Màiri McAllan, referenced climate activists in Malawi and appeared to suggest that Scottish Conservatives had criticised them in some way. I have spoken to my colleagues, and we can find no basis for that. Based on what the cabinet secretary has said, we are very supportive of those climate activists. I wanted to ensure that that is on the record.

Moving to this debate, I thank the clerks and all those who provided support for the bill. As I have made clear previously, the Scottish Conservatives support the general principles of the bill. A circular economy is a simple concept: keep materials in use for as long as possible to extract the maximum value from them. In fact, it is so simple that people could be forgiven for thinking that we surely must be doing that anyway. However, Scotland's economy is just 1.3 per cent circular, according to "Circularity Gap Report Scotland". The hope was that the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill could shift the needle, so that we would catch up with the rest of the United Kingdom, which is 7.5 per cent circular. As I have pointed out before, the bill as introduced was little more than a glorified waste and litter bill. Those

are important issues, of course, but that version of the bill hardly represented the ambition that we need to build a sustainable economy and for it to thrive.

Members will remember my promise at stage 1 to work constructively to strengthen the bill. I kept my end of the bargain, as did Scottish Conservative colleagues, in lodging dozens of amendments at stage 2 on everything from reuse to procurement to human rights. However, the sincere efforts from Opposition parties were met with a wall of opposition from the Scottish National Party at both stage 2 and stage 3.

For example, yesterday the SNP opposed ensuring that a code of practice for local authority waste collection would be produced by March 2026, even though that is the date by which the SNP claims that it will be ready. On top of that, the SNP opposes providing local authorities with sufficient resources to carry out the actions required of them—and, for good measure, the SNP also voted against its own recycling targets, which is confusing, given that it claims that it still intends to meet them.

Such opposition is especially disappointing, given how bad recycling has become under the SNP. Even after over a decade of trying, it has still not managed to deliver its 2013 household recycling target, so new thinking is clearly needed. However, the new approach of the Scottish Government is exactly the same as the strategy that has been deployed for the past 20 years. At least that is circular.

As I explained in my opening comments, recycling is not the primary goal of waste management—hence the Scottish Conservative amendments to ensure that support to prepare for reuse is included, and even prioritised, when it comes to household waste, unsold goods and local authority reuse schemes. Again, the SNP acted to block progress, this time opposing the vital inclusion of reuse and repair in the bill.

On a more positive note, the bill will, for the first time, require the production of a circular economy strategy that is regularly reviewed. Alongside the strategy, we of course need tangible goals to reach for and to measure progress against, but the SNP's original plan was for targets to be optional. That is just not good enough, and it creates a terrible market signal for businesses and investors that the Scottish Government is not serious about building a circular economy. That is why the Scottish Conservatives lodged amendments to ensure that circular economy targets were included. If we expect the private sector to get involved at all, the public sector should also be contributing. However, yet again, the SNP opposed that, and voted against a requirement for public bodies to produce circular economy plans.

Gillian Martin: I am keen to have a tone of debate this afternoon that reflects my experience of working on the bill. I genuinely thought that I worked very constructively and collaboratively with every single party in the Parliament. That does not seem to have been Mr Golden's experience, yet that is my experience of working with him.

Maurice Golden: We are perhaps talking about two separate aspects. My feeling is one of frustration and deflation regarding the bill, but I would certainly regard myself and the soon-to-be cabinet secretary as having a very constructive relationship, with constructive discussions. Ultimately, the proof of the pudding is in the eating—and that is one that leaves a very sour taste in the mouth. At one point, the process became outright farce, with the SNP even opposing the bill including a definition of what the circular economy is.

That all adds up to an impression that the SNP does not really care about creating a circular economy. We can just look at the foot dragging even to get the bill introduced—that is no comment on the current minister. I even had to threaten to introduce my own bill to embarrass the SNP into doing it.

Even if the SNP is not interested, it has been encouraging to see many across Parliament who are. The Scottish Conservatives lodged dozens of amendments. I also give credit to Sarah Boyack, Monica Lennon and, indeed, the SNP MSP Ben Macpherson for their constructive suggestions.

Despite missed opportunities in the bill, it can still make a difference to waste management and littering if ministers can at least commit to properly implementing the measures that it contains. The task ahead is to ensure that they do not shirk that responsibility.

17:30

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I, too, start by thanking the committee, the clerks and all the organisations that worked tirelessly to get the legislation that we urgently need and the proper debate that we need. I particularly agree with the minister on the cross-party work, especially on amendments at stages 2 and 3. I was glad that I was able to secure support for my amendment last night with support from the minister's team to provide for vital guidance to be published on the restrictions on the disposal of consumer goods to ensure that damaged or contaminated goods are not reused where it would not be safe. I very much welcome that.

The bill is not as good as it could have been but, because of the constructive work that was done at stages 2 and 3, it is better than the draft. My personal view is that the bill is still a missed

opportunity, because it is more about recycling and waste management than it is about seizing the opportunity to deliver the circular economy that is highlighted in the bill's name that our constituents, businesses, planet and environment need.

We do not have the clear purpose that Maurice Golden proposed at stage 3 and I proposed at stage 2 that would have added strength to the bill. We will still have to wait to see the heavy lifting that is required to maximise the benefits of a circular economy, because implementation will be crucial.

One key issue that is important to highlight is funding. For local authorities, that will be key to whether the ambitions in the framework legislation are delivered. Our Labour colleagues in Wales understood that, which is why the Labour Government worked hard in negotiating with local government colleagues to deliver one of the highest recycling rates in the world. It took a decade of investment and £1 billion to make sure that they had the infrastructure and capacity to deliver on pragmatic and ambitious targets.

Gillian Martin: Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: If it is brief, yes.

Gillian Martin: I recognise what the Welsh Government has achieved, but it is also important that the deliverers on the ground come back to us and say what they want to achieve, so that we can look at the funding for what they want to do.

Sarah Boyack: As I understand it, it was a negotiation in Wales.

In its analysis of the bill, the Finance and Public Administration Committee raised concerns about the pressures on local authorities and said that more work will need to be done to address cost savings and changes to revenues that the bill would lead to. The code of practice is a key issue and it is key that partnership work and funding take place.

The waste hierarchy is important, because we tend to focus on how we deal with waste instead of supporting our communities and businesses to repurpose, reuse, repair and recycle goods and products and materials, rather than seeing them going to waste and damaging our environment and communities. Where the circular economy is critical is in how we design products in the first place, so that they do not become obsolete, with valuable materials that could be reused being dumped.

One of the missed opportunities that I hope the minister will come back to was in Maurice Golden's stage 3 amendment to require public bodies to prepare a circular economy plan. That is

critical, because public procurement is key. It would incentivise investment in circular economy products, practices and supply chains, raise awareness among public bodies and make a real difference. I hope that the minister will come back to that.

We need stronger action on how we deal with plastics that damage our environment, whether on land or sea and it is about coming together to think about what more can be done there. Recently, I was contacted by a constituent who, as a schoolteacher, was taking school students to take part in a beach clean, and they were shocked to see the levels of pollution there, and a lot of it was plastic. One of the things that will be key to the implementation of the bill will be investing in schools and involving them in the discussion, so that we educate young people about the damage that is caused by waste and what they can do to stop it. From talking to parents, I know that kids sometimes feed back information from schools.

We need to make everybody aware of the impact of avoiding the generation of waste and dealing with the waste that we produce much more responsibly, we need to make demands on companies and local authorities in that regard, and we need support to be provided for the fantastic community projects that enable our constituents to reuse and repair products. There is a lot more that we could do in that area.

I have mentioned missed opportunities, and I want to finish by giving a couple of examples. One of those involved my global responsibility ambition in relation to not offshoring our waste and leaving other countries to deal with it. Between 2004 and 2022, Scottish waste exports rose from 0.4 megatonnes to 1.5 megatonnes, which is a massive increase.

Whether on our climate ambitions or our efforts to be a global leader, we need to do more. We need to take more seriously the issue of where our materials come from and the human rights and environmental impacts of that, and we need to make sure that work to address that is built into our everyday work and that the public sector leads on that. We will have to come back to the bill, because the job is not finished.

17:35

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): The Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill is an important one for the Scottish Greens, because of its significance in changing the shape of the economy in Scotland from a linear economy to a circular one. It is no longer acceptable to casually extract materials to make items that will be used only once or just a few times and then throw them away. The burden of minimising waste, and handling it when it is

unavoidable, needs to be firmly placed on the businesses that create it and profit from it.

The Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill is a significant step forward on that journey. I am grateful to the minister for picking up the bill at very short notice at stage 2 and successfully bringing it to stage 3 today. I also thank all the officials who have worked on the bill with me, with the minister and with members across the chamber. A better team of officials you will not find. Working with them was a privilege and a joy. I thank members of this Parliament, including everyone who sat up late last night and those members who took the care and time to suggest amendments to the bill and to collaborate to make it the best circular economy bill that it could be.

The powers that are conveyed by the bill sit in the gap between the powers that Scotland already has but is not necessarily using and the powers that Scotland does not and cannot have because they are reserved to Westminster. Many matters that are critical for creating a circular economy are not devolved to the Scottish Parliament, including matters around consumer goods, labelling, international trade and the design of products. Extraction of oil and gas from the North Sea is a significant contributor to Scotland's material consumption, but that is not a matter that the Scottish Parliament has power over, so we are dependent on Westminster Governments following our lead and matching the level of ambition that Scotland has shown this week. I challenge the incoming Westminster Government to do that.

The Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill is a framework bill. It empowers the Scottish Government to bring forward measures such as charges on single-use items. It builds on powers that Scotland already has, such as the power to require businesses to take back products that they sell or produce.

The measure of the bill's success will lie not simply in our passing it but in our taking up the powers that it conveys and putting in place practical actions, such as a charge on single-use cups to motivate consumers to carry their own reusable cup, which is modelled on the successful charge on plastic bags that has led all of us to get used to carrying our own bags to the shop.

The Scottish Government needs to move forward with requiring particularly large businesses to report on food waste and surplus, and to get on with delivering a ban on the landfilling and incineration of unsold durable goods. It is urgent that we move directly to the delivery of those measures and the other measures that are proposed in the waste route map.

When people ask, "What can we do to protect the environment?", the answer lies here. The

answers when it comes to getting plastic out of our oceans, reducing emissions and preventing pollution are here. We need to prevent the waste from being created in the first place, to reduce the use of unnecessary plastics and to design products and businesses for zero waste. I challenge the Scottish Government and members across the chamber not only to pass the bill today but to work together to urgently deliver on the promise that is being made by it.

17:39

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): As others have done, I thank the organisations and individuals who provided evidence and informed the scrutiny of the bill, and I acknowledge the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's work in undertaking that scrutiny pretty forensically.

This area of policy has always benefited from good cross-party collaboration, which has been in evidence throughout the bill process. As a result, as Sarah Boyack said, the bill is now much improved compared with what was introduced.

In particular, I commend the MSPs who led the consideration of the 100-and-whatever amendments yesterday evening. That allowed for constructive changes to be made, and some amendments were useful challenges that prompted commitments from the minister.

I make a special mention of Graham Simpson, who demonstrated that members do not have to press every amendment to a vote in order to make their point. I hope that others have learned that lesson.

I also thank the minister, who, as others have said, had the bill added to her portfolio at late notice, midway through the process. I am very grateful to her for the collaborative approach that she took in her engagement with me, and I detect that she took the same approach with members across the chamber. It would be fair to say that that approach was adopted by her predecessor, Lorna Slater, too.

At stage 1, I echoed concerns that were expressed by other members that the bill was light on detail, lacked clarity and did not measure up to its lofty ambitions and the needs of the moment. The final bill is certainly not perfect, and it leaves much of the heavy lifting to a future circular economy strategy and future targets, which are to be developed by ministers and others in due course. Nonetheless, there have been welcome changes that have added much-needed detail, and there are now provisions that embed just transition principles and strengthen the recognition that, in a circular economy, reducing consumption is just as important as reducing waste.

I very much welcome the commitments that the minister made yesterday on issues that did not make it into the final text, including, as Sarah Boyack indicated, on the joint working with the UK Government that will be necessary to reduce waste exports, which mask our own waste and emissions while causing untold damage to the environment overseas.

As I said in the stage 1 debate, the bill is timely, because it is more urgent than ever that we reduce our consumption-based emissions in order to combat climate change. In that context, and given the commitment to the necessary follow-through in the circular economy strategy and the other undertakings that were made by the minister, I confirm that Scottish Liberal Democrats will vote for the bill at decision time.

The Presiding Officer: We move to winding-up speeches.

17:42

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I am very proud that the bill will be passed today. It has been a long time in the making. Covid delayed the introduction of a bill on the circular economy in the previous session of Parliament, so it is welcome to see the bill before us today. The bill is a product of positive cross-party work across the chamber. In many ways, it has shown Holyrood working at its best.

I join other members in paying tribute to my Green colleague Lorna Slater. I am pleased that she took the opportunity to speak in the debate. She successfully led the bill's development through all the stakeholder negotiation and drafting, and she secured a positive recommendation from the committee at stage 1. I thank her and the bill team for their work.

I also thank the new minister, Gillian Martin, who picked up the bill at incredibly short notice in somewhat bizarre circumstances. She kept the spirit of co-operative working very much alive throughout stages 2 and 3.

Last night, amendments from every party in the chamber were agreed to and included in the bill. I thank the environmental non-governmental organisations for inspiring many of the amendments and for their positive discussions with MSP colleagues. Who knows? Perhaps if everyone who supported the amendments had actually voted last night, more might have been agreed to in the bill.

Throughout the bill's passage, the Government has made it clear that the bill will set a framework for action on the circular economy. It is a framework bill, and there was an on-going debate in the committee about what would appropriately

be put in the bill and what would appropriately come afterwards. The key element—co-design—is really important.

The elephant in the room is, of course, the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020. We will see how the incoming Westminster Government will treat that act in relation to Scotland's ability to take action and develop statutory instruments on the back of the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill.

Some members have said that the bill is primarily focused on household recycling—Sarah Boyack mentioned that there is, perhaps, a sense of disappointment about that—but I do not think that it is, although household recycling is an important element of it. We have to recognise that levels of household recycling have plateaued in Scotland in recent years, so it is important that the bill equips councils to take the next big step in investing in recycling.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Ruskell: I am a little short of time, so I will not, unless there is time in hand.

I turn to the Green amendments. I am pleased that we made progress on ensuring that ministers will consider reuse, refill and take-back schemes. The critical thing is to ensure that ministers do not just consider those things, but that they act on those powers.

I regret that we could not make more headway with amendments on public funding. I am also a bit disappointed that Maurice Golden's amendment to strengthen the reporting requirement on public bodies was not agreed to. I hope that that discussion can continue, and I thank Action to Protect Rural Scotland for its support on those cross-party discussions.

I welcome the minister's offer to look at how the issue of critical minerals recycling can be addressed in other parts of the Government's energy policy. The case that was set out by Friends of the Earth Scotland on why Scotland needs to plan for how we prolong use of key minerals such as copper and lithium, particularly in the renewables sector, is strong, and I hope to see mention of critical minerals recycling and reuse in the upcoming energy strategy.

I am also pleased that Green amendments strengthened the bill's focus on education and skills needs for the transition to a more circular economy. Finally, I am pleased that our amendments to require ministers to consider carbon emissions across a product's entire life cycle when preparing circular economy strategies were agreed to. That will be critical to addressing the climate crisis.

In closing, I say that the bill is excellent, but it is only the first step towards delivering a circular economy. Lorna Slater's point is critical; it is about how the powers are now used, so the Scottish Greens will continue to push for action and push the Government to use the powers that the bill will give it to deliver that circular economy.

17:47

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): As other members have, I record my thanks to Scottish Parliament staff, particularly in the Scottish Parliament information centre, for supporting the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. I also thank all the members of the committee and Scottish Government officials for their support.

I was pleased to hear Lorna Slater making a contribution. I also thank Gillian Martin for being generous with her time at short notice to work not just with me but with many colleagues around the chamber.

Scottish Labour believes that the bill as amended is stronger and better than it was when it was introduced, which is testament to cross-party working by members. That is why I am a little surprised that Maurice Golden does not seem to be his usual enthusiastic self today. Perhaps a bit of tiredness has set in. Every party in the chamber has added to the bill, which is a good thing.

At every stage of the bill, Scottish Labour has made sure that innocent householders will not be criminalised for the actions of others or for making the simple mistake of putting the wrong thing in the wrong bin, which is important. We have also tried to embed incentivising good behaviour and creating opportunities.

In closing the debate for Scottish Labour, I want to reflect on what my amendments and my colleague Sarah Boyack's amendments contribute. I think that they strengthen the bill, particularly in relation to provisions on due diligence, human rights, environmental impact and global supply chains. All that is important. Our approach will also ensure that the secondary legislation to come will be strengthened in relation to reducing carbon emissions and on exempting food from the provisions relating to unsold consumer goods.

I thank the Government for working constructively with us, but we are disappointed, in the sense that we would have liked the Scottish Government to strengthen the bill further around reuse and the just transition, because some stakeholders wanted closer alignment with the just transition principles in the Climate Change Act 2008. Our amendments would have helped with

that, but we will continue to work with the Scottish Government to do more.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government has committed to work on improving access to reusable nappies. We will see that in the route map and, I hope, in the co-design process with local authorities. I hope that the minister will establish a short-life working group to work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other partners to build on the findings of the James Hutton Institute's report and the work that has been done by North Ayrshire Council.

We are very short of time, even though we did a lot of work on the bill. It is fair to say that some stakeholders have been concerned that the Government was not being ambitious enough; we have just had a debate on the climate emergency. We are putting faith in the Government on the circular economy, but we hope and expect to see action through the strategy and the route map.

It is important to say that we welcome the clarity around funding, but the matter requires the right framework and a fair approach as well as the right funding, because local authorities in particular need to be empowered to take the work forward.

I will end with the words not of circular economy guru Maurice Golden—he is a bit tired today—but of Ellen MacArthur, who said:

"If we could build an economy that would use things rather than use them up, we could build a future."

I hope that those words will resonate. There is an opportunity before us to create a new economy in which we use rather than use up.

I thank the Presiding Officer for her generosity, and I look forward to working with the minister.

17:51

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): When considering a bill, it is always useful to have a look at what it is meant to achieve. To do so, we need look no further than the general principles, which we all agreed to. They are:

"to prepare and publish a circular economy strategy; to make provision about circular economy targets; to make provision about the reduction, recycling and management of waste; and for connected purposes."

I said during the stage 1 debate that we do not need a bill to have a strategy—incidentally, I agree with the First Minister that we have too many of those—or to set targets. I also said that I had concerns about the framework nature of the bill, and that I would not support it if it was not improved.

When the marathon stage 2 ended, I was definitely of a mind to oppose the bill, because the minister dug in and opposed a series of sensible

amendments that would have led to greater reuse and greater recycling, along with deadlines. She got her way to block those green measures with the support of the committee's Green member—it was all very bizarre. I had to hold out hope that things would change at stage 3. To be fair, there were some very friendly and cordial discussions with the minister, but I have to say that she gave the impression that she was trying to find reasons to oppose useful amendments rather than trying to find ways of making them work.

Yesterday, there were a number of examples in which she questioned, quite rightly, the wording of amendments. However, the wording could have been fixed had we known about the issues with it. So much for the new politics that was promised by the First Minister. The valiant efforts on this side of the chamber to improve the bill largely failed. The one crumb that I had from Gillian Martin's table was an amendment that would see us prioritise the reuse over the recycling of unsold goods in the waste hierarchy.

During the course of four days at stage 2 and a lengthy stage 3, that was it for me. There were no targets, no holding the Government's feet to the fire and no ambition. Maurice Golden, who has been this Parliament's greatest cheerleader for the circular economy, suffered a similar fate, and he must be feeling very deflated—he is deflated. He spoke earlier about the lack of market signals, and he spoke of his frustration. I do not blame him. The only thing that we can say was getting recycled yesterday was the Bute house agreement, as Mark Ruskell did the Government's bidding for it.

The bill will not change much, but there are still potential traps for the unwary, such as a fish-and-chip tax—your suppers could become more expensive.

My test for the bill is whether it will lead to change. I have to say that I do not think that it will see us reusing or recycling more, as my failed attempt to push the recycling industry into dealing with items such as drink cartons showed.

Monica Lennon: Will the member take an intervention?

Graham Simpson: No—I have no time, I am afraid. The minister said that she thinks the one thing that the bill will lead to will be waste managers sharing best practice. Lorna Slater said that it could lead to us all carrying our own coffee cups about. Well, if that is it, it is not a very exciting bill.

Having said all that, though, I am prepared to give the bill a chance—not least because it now contains measures to tackle fly-tipping, which will please Murdo Fraser, and a few other crumbs from the minister's table.

The Presiding Officer: I call Gillian Martin to close the debate. You have up to five minutes, minister.

17:55

Gillian Martin: I may have been in my current role for only a short time, but in my opening remarks I was able to refer to the constructive nature of the engagement that I have had with members and stakeholders in developing and improving the bill.

I want to point to some aspects that members raised at stage 2, which I went away and thought about. I considered how we could achieve the bill's intentions. The wording might not always have made it on to the face of the bill, but I will take many points away from my experience of taking the bill forward.

Maurice Golden is tired and probably a bit grumpy, but I want to highlight that he, quite rightly, challenged the Government to undertake an analysis of the current waste infrastructure in Scotland, to see where the gaps were. Such work should not necessarily form part of a piece of legislation, but I have said that the Government would undertake it because he is absolutely right. We need to know what we have and how it is being used, and we need to know where the gaps are. Are there certain materials that Scotland cannot recycle, and are there certain areas that we are missing? I thank Mr Golden for coming up with that constructive idea.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): It is right that that suggestion was progressed, but it would surely have been a lot better had it not been hollowed out by another amendment that scooped half of that plan out.

Gillian Martin: Douglas Lumsden is perhaps a little bit confused. I will just say that the infrastructure analysis that will be conducted will be thorough. I do not believe that the plan has been hollowed out in any way; rather, that analysis will provide more flexibility for what we seek to achieve. I do not want to spend my entire speech talking about one improvement to the bill, though.

At stage 2, Sarah Boyack brought up many issues on the disposal of contaminated goods, as did many other members. I was pleased to work with Ms Boyack on those. She has long experience of working in the area and wanted to see the bill deal with those specific issues.

I also want to address those members who mentioned Scotland's responsibility not to offshore our waste. We are in a situation where what happens at UK level is a reserved matter. However, we have put measures in the bill that show that we want to ensure that waste is dealt

with as locally as possible. Maurice Golden brought up that issue at stage 2. Other members, such as Monica Lennon and Mark Ruskell, also mentioned offshore waste. In fact, many members mentioned it, so we have put in the bill provisions to recognise that we must do what we can to deal with our own waste as domestically as possible.

I was happy to hear Sarah Boyack referencing her Welsh colleagues. I have had good early engagement with Huw Irranca-Davies of the Welsh Government on the issue. The strategic waste fund in Scotland has given £1 billion to local authorities to take similar action, but the Welsh Government has got it right in this area. I am working with Mr Irranca-Davies on arrangements for a deposit return scheme. I hope to take up his offer for me to go down to Wales and talk to him about the measures that are being taken there.

I was astonished that Monica Lennon did not mention nappies in her closing speech, so I feel that I have to. *[Laughter.]* We had a great discussion about how that is one of the areas in which we can have a circular economy and consider matters through a gendered lens. I was pleased to work with Ms Lennon on some of her amendments.

Lorna Slater recognised the power of cross-party working when she was taking the bill forward and seeing it develop. I have taken my lead from her on that. She recognises the measures that the Parliament supported. People will lodge amendments that will not be voted for—the Parliament decides on them. We can move on and accept the fact that an awful lot of amendments that were put forward had cross-party agreement, which strengthened the bill. I think that Lorna Slater mentioned that.

I thank Liam McArthur for the constructive conversations that we have had about some of the unintended consequences that there might have been for the third sector if certain amendments had been agreed to.

The bill is a significant milestone, but it does not stand on its own. Alongside the bill, we published our draft circular economy and waste route map, which will provide strategic direction to deliver a system-wide vision for Scotland's circular economy for 2030. The final route map will be published later this year. We are also introducing the extended producer responsibility for packaging, alongside other United Kingdom Governments, which will require producers to pay local authorities the full net cost of operating an efficient and effective household packaging waste collection and disposal service.

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to conclude, minister.

Gillian Martin: I will leave it there. There is so much more that I could say.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill at stage 3.

Business Motion

18:01

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-13780, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 3 September 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 4 September 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Deputy First Minister Responsibilities,
Economy and Gaelic;
Finance and Local Government

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 5 September 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Net Zero and Energy, and Transport

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 10 September 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 11 September 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands;
NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 12 September 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Social Justice

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 2 September 2024, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

18:01

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of parliamentary bureau motion S6M-13792, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Short-term Lets) Amendment Order 2024 [draft] be approved.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

18:01

Rachael Hamilton (Etrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):

The SSI relates to the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Short-term Lets) (Amendment) Order 2024. Scotland's tourism sector is an incredibly important part of our economy, both locally and nationally. I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of interests, which states that I am a director of a small hotel in the Borders. Tourism is also incredibly important to our rural, coastal and island communities.

Accommodation providers have been calling for the Scottish Government to reconsider the way in which it has approached its short-term lets licensing scheme since it was introduced, and we are glad that some of those calls have been heard. The amendments, which relate primarily to technical details, are welcome and show a willingness to listen to those who understand the sector best. Temporary licence exemptions and provisional licence grants for new STLs will help to relieve some of the burden on struggling businesses and allow the quality of Scotland's accommodation to grow. Additionally, addressing the loophole to permit licences to be transferred to a new host will allow there to be less disruption for those who are visiting remote, rural and island communities where there may be fewer alternative places to stay. However, although the principle behind the amendments remains sound, they still do not go far enough, nor do they fully listen to the concerns of accommodation providers across Scotland.

Stakeholders such as Scottish Land & Estates have highlighted the lack of detail in the amendments, stating that although the increased engagement with the accommodation sector is welcome, a clarity shortfall is evident, which could lead to unintended consequences from the instrument, burdening even more businesses in

the short-term let industry. The Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers has said that the

"onerous dual licensing and planning requirements"

that go along with STL licensing are

"By far the biggest obstacle"

to its successful implementation, and the amendments do not address that.

The intention of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 is that existing businesses should be protected but not impacted by retrospective planning considerations. I know that the ASSC is in conversation with the Minister for Business and the Minister for Public Finance, who has responsibility for planning, on the order. It will amend the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Short-term Lets) Order 2022 and require STL guidance to be amended, as per Burness Paull opinion. More critically, it will require a new use-class order to be created for short-term lets. Existing operators would automatically be moved to that UCO. It should be a mixed UCO—residential and STL—to enable properties to revert to residential without the requirement for planning permission.

Furthermore, groups such as the Scottish Bed and Breakfast Association have, similarly, stated that 77 per cent of their membership have

"reported ... negative or extremely negative"

impacts on their business since STL licensing came into force.

The Short Term Accommodation Association has called for "a comprehensive review" of the short-term let licensing scheme to fully understand its impact on our vital short-term let sector, and Scottish Conservatives agree that that should happen.

I am running out of time, so I will stop there, but there is so much more to say. I hope that members will agree with the points that I have made. Although Scottish Conservatives agree on the points that have been addressed with the technical amendments, we will not be supporting the motion tonight—we will abstain, and I hope that other members will do so, too.

The Presiding Officer: I call Shirley-Anne Somerville to respond.

18:05

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this Scottish statutory instrument today. It is important, not only because it puts in place safety standards throughout Scotland, but because we have to recognise the

contribution that this important sector makes to the tourism industry.

The short-term let licensing scheme delivers a set of basic safety standards to protect guests, hosts and communities and to guarantee high-quality accommodation across Scotland. It is those core principles around safety that underpin our approach throughout. When the Minister for Housing appeared at committee, he made it clear that the amendments in this order deliver on our commitment to make technical updates as a direct result of feedback from a range of stakeholders. He and I thank those stakeholders for the continued discussions that they are having with Government.

The minister has also made it clear that we are still in a transitional period, in which many thousands of operators have recently taken action to comply with legislation, and authorities are still processing applications for existing hosts. Although I understand that some groups in the sector are encouraging us to go further, any action must be taken forward in a measured way.

I see that Craig Hoy wants to come in; I am happy to give way to him.

The Presiding Officer: I call Craig Hoy.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Apologies, Presiding Officer—I think that I hit the button by mistake.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I thank Craig Hoy for the intervention; I am happy to agree with him on that point. [*Laughter.*]

We will, of course, continue to work with and listen to stakeholders. The industry advisory group, which is chaired by VisitScotland, and which several industry representatives are part of, has met at least 14 times in the past two years. The most recent meeting was also attended by the Minister for Housing.

Some of the provisions in the order, such as ensuring smoother processing for the transfer of licences and introducing more flexibility on the use of temporary exemptions, were included as a direct result of that engagement, offering technical clarifications and operational improvements for businesses.

The approach that is being taken in the order aligns with both our commitment to support businesses, and with the Verity house agreement, in recognising that licensing authorities have statutory responsibility for delivering the scheme. It ensures that the high quality of accommodation that visitors expect in Scotland is maintained, and prioritises the importance of doing business.

Given that Rachael Hamilton has said that she agrees with the technical aspects that are actually in the SSI, I urge members to vote for the motion.

Rachael Hamilton: There looks to be a move for the Government to continue to speak with the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers and those in the short-term let sector, in particular on reviewing the short-term let licensing scheme. Can the Government commit to that, following this discussion?

The Presiding Officer: I ask you to wind up, cabinet secretary.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Certainly, Presiding Officer.

We are absolutely determined to carry on that discussion. The Minister for Housing has met stakeholders on a number of occasions, as have other ministers, and we will continue that dialogue.

While we are determined to move forward with short-term licensing because of the safety measures that I mentioned at the start of my contribution, I assure members that we will continue to engage with everyone, and the Minister of Housing looks forward to doing so very soon.

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

The next item of business is consideration of five Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-13781, on approval of a proposed revised social security charter; S6M-13782, on committee membership; S6M-13783 and S6M-13784, on substitution on committees; and S6M-13795, on committee remits.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Proposed Revised Social Security Charter (SG/2024/96) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Patrick Harvie be appointed to replace Mark Ruskell as a member of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Jackie Dunbar be appointed to replace Kevin Stewart as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee;

Elena Whitham be appointed to replace Fulton MacGregor as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Collette Stevenson be appointed to replace Colin Beattie as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, and

Rona Mackay be appointed to replace Alasdair Allan as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Gillian Mackay be appointed to replace Ross Greer as the Scottish Green Party substitute on the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee;

Lorna Slater be appointed to replace Mark Ruskell as the Scottish Green Party substitute on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Lorna Slater be appointed to replace Maggie Chapman as the Scottish Green Party substitute on the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, and

Patrick Harvie be appointed to replace Maggie Chapman as the Scottish Green Party substitute on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the remits of committees—

Name of Committee: Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Remit: To consider and report on the following (and any additional matter added under Rule 6.1.5A)—

(a) the Scottish Government's EU and external affairs policy;

(b) policy in relation to the UK's exit from the EU;

(c) the international activities of the Scottish Administration, including international development; and

(d) any other matter falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and any matter relating to intergovernmental relations within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.

(e) matters falling within the responsibility of the Minister for Independence.

New Remit: To consider and report on the following (and any additional matter added under Rule 6.1.5A)—

(a) the Scottish Government's EU and external affairs policy;

(b) policy in relation to the UK's exit from the EU;

(c) the international activities of the Scottish Administration, including international development; and

(d) any other matter falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and any matter relating to intergovernmental relations within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.

Name of Committee: Economy and Fair Work Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy, with the exception of matters relating to net zero and energy.

New remit: To consider and report on matters within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic, with the exception of Gaelic; and on matters relating to just transition.

Name of Committee: Education, Children and Young People Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and matters relating to the Historical Abuse Inquiry and redress falling within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.

New Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within

the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and matters relating to the Historical Abuse Inquiry, redress and languages falling within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.

Name of Committee: Finance and Public Administration Committee

Remit: To consider and report on the following (and any additional matter added under Rule 6.1.5A)—

(a) any report or other document containing proposals for, or budgets of, public revenue or expenditure or proposals for the making of a Scottish rate resolution, taking into account any report or recommendations concerning such documents made by any other committee with power to consider such documents or any part of them;

(b) any report made by a committee setting out proposals concerning public revenue or expenditure;

(c) Budget Bills; and

(d) any other matter relating to or affecting the revenue or expenditure of the Scottish Administration or other monies payable into or expenditure payable out of the Scottish Consolidated Fund.

(e) matters relating to public service reform and the National Performance Framework within the responsibilities of the Deputy First Minister and public administration.

New remit: To consider and report on the following (and any additional matter added under Rule 6.1.5A)—

(a) any report or other document containing proposals for, or budgets of, public revenue or expenditure or proposals for the making of a Scottish rate resolution, taking into account any report or recommendations concerning such documents made by any other committee with power to consider such documents or any part of them;

(b) any report made by a committee setting out proposals concerning public revenue or expenditure;

(c) Budget Bills; and

(d) any other matter relating to or affecting the revenue or expenditure of the Scottish Administration or other monies payable into or expenditure payable out of the Scottish Consolidated Fund.

(e) matters relating to the National Performance Framework within the responsibilities of the Deputy First Minister, public service reform within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, and public administration.

Name of Committee: Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care and matters relating to drugs and alcohol policy.

New remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care.

Name of Committee: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters relating to local government and planning falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and matters relating to housing and tenants' rights within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and matters relating to the Local Government Boundary Commission and local

governance review and democratic renewal within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.

New remit: To consider and report on matters relating to local government and planning falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, matters relating to housing and tenants' rights within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, and matters relating to local government boundaries, local governance review and democratic renewal.

Name of Committee: Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy, with the exception of matters relating to wellbeing economy, and just transition; and on matters relating to land reform, natural resources and peatland, Scottish Land Commission; Crown Estate Scotland, and Royal Botanic Garden within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands.

New remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy, with the exception of matters relating to just transition; and on matters relating to land reform, natural resources and peatland, Scottish Land Commission, Crown Estate Scotland and Royal Botanic Garden within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Decision Time

18:09

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-13759.3, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13759, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scottish Government priorities: tackling the climate emergency, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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

18:09

Meeting suspended.

18:11

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The vote is closed.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect to the app. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Baillie. We will ensure that your vote is recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)

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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-13759.3, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, is: For 50, Against 68, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-13759.2, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13759, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scottish Government priorities: tackling the climate emergency, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-13759.2, in the name of Sarah Boyack, is: For 58, Against 59, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-13759.1, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13759, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scottish Government priorities: tackling the climate emergency, 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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 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) (Con)
 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)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)

Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 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)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 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)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 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 is: For 8, Against 108, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-13759, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scottish Government priorities: tackling the climate emergency, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament reaffirms its unwavering commitment to tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss through a just and fair transition; believes firmly in, and accepts, climate science and expert advice and its importance in reaching net zero, and rejects, therefore, climate science denial.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-13757, in the name of Gillian Martin, on the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill at stage 3, be agreed to. As this is a motion to pass the bill, the question must be decided by 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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)

Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 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)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)

Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 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 is: For 116, Against 0, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-13792, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, 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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 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)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-13792 is: For 68, Against 0, Abstentions 46.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Short-term Lets) Amendment Order 2024 [draft] be approved.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. On the division on amendment S6M-13759.1, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which sought to amend motion S6M-13759, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scottish Government priorities: tackling the climate emergency, I inadvertently voted yes. I know that nothing can be done to remedy that, but I thought it important to put on the record that I should have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr McArthur. You will be well aware that that is not a point of order.

I propose to ask a single question on five Parliamentary Bureau motions. As no member has objected, the final question is, that motions S6M-13781, on the approval of the proposed revised social security charter, S6M-13782, on committee membership, S6M-13783 and S6M-13784, on substitution on committees, and S6M-13795, on committee remits, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Proposed Revised Social Security Charter (SG/2024/96) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Patrick Harvie be appointed to replace Mark Ruskell as a member of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Jackie Dunbar be appointed to replace Kevin Stewart as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee;

Elena Whitham be appointed to replace Fulton MacGregor as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Collette Stevenson be appointed to replace Colin Beattie as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, and

Rona Mackay be appointed to replace Alasdair Allan as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Gillian Mackay be appointed to replace Ross Greer as the Scottish Green Party substitute on the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee;

Lorna Slater be appointed to replace Mark Ruskell as the Scottish Green Party substitute on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Lorna Slater be appointed to replace Maggie Chapman as the Scottish Green Party substitute on the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, and

Patrick Harvie be appointed to replace Maggie Chapman as the Scottish Green Party substitute on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the remits of committees—

Name of Committee: Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Remit: To consider and report on the following (and any additional matter added under Rule 6.1.5A)—

(a) the Scottish Government's EU and external affairs policy;

(b) policy in relation to the UK's exit from the EU;

(c) the international activities of the Scottish Administration, including international development; and

(d) any other matter falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and any matter relating to intergovernmental relations within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.

(e) matters falling within the responsibility of the Minister for Independence.

New Remit: To consider and report on the following (and any additional matter added under Rule 6.1.5A)—

(a) the Scottish Government's EU and external affairs policy;

(b) policy in relation to the UK's exit from the EU;

(c) the international activities of the Scottish Administration, including international development; and

(d) any other matter falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and any matter relating to intergovernmental

relations within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.

Name of Committee: Economy and Fair Work Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy, with the exception of matters relating to net zero and energy.

New remit: To consider and report on matters within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic, with the exception of Gaelic; and on matters relating to just transition.

Name of Committee: Education, Children and Young People Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and matters relating to the Historical Abuse Inquiry and redress falling within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.

New Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and matters relating to the Historical Abuse Inquiry, redress and languages falling within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.

Name of Committee: Finance and Public Administration Committee

Remit: To consider and report on the following (and any additional matter added under Rule 6.1.5A)—

(a) any report or other document containing proposals for, or budgets of, public revenue or expenditure or proposals for the making of a Scottish rate resolution, taking into account any report or recommendations concerning such documents made by any other committee with power to consider such documents or any part of them;

(b) any report made by a committee setting out proposals concerning public revenue or expenditure;

(c) Budget Bills; and

(d) any other matter relating to or affecting the revenue or expenditure of the Scottish Administration or other monies payable into or expenditure payable out of the Scottish Consolidated Fund.

(e) matters relating to public service reform and the National Performance Framework within the responsibilities of the Deputy First Minister and public administration.

New remit: To consider and report on the following (and any additional matter added under Rule 6.1.5A)—

(a) any report or other document containing proposals for, or budgets of, public revenue or expenditure or proposals for the making of a Scottish rate resolution, taking into account any report or recommendations concerning such documents made by any other committee with power to consider such documents or any part of them;

(b) any report made by a committee setting out proposals concerning public revenue or expenditure;

(c) Budget Bills; and

(d) any other matter relating to or affecting the revenue or expenditure of the Scottish Administration or other monies payable into or expenditure payable out of the Scottish Consolidated Fund.

(e) matters relating to the National Performance Framework within the responsibilities of the Deputy First Minister,

public service reform within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, and public administration.

Name of Committee: Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care and matters relating to drugs and alcohol policy.

New remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care.

Name of Committee: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters relating to local government and planning falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and matters relating to housing and tenants' rights within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and matters relating to the Local Government Boundary Commission and local governance review and democratic renewal within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.

New remit: To consider and report on matters relating to local government and planning falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, matters relating to housing and tenants' rights within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, and matters relating to local government boundaries, local governance review and democratic renewal.

Name of Committee: Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy, with the exception of matters relating to wellbeing economy, and just transition; and on matters relating to land reform, natural resources and peatland, Scottish Land Commission; Crown Estate Scotland, and Royal Botanic Garden within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands.

New remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy, with the exception of matters relating to just transition; and on matters relating to land reform, natural resources and peatland, Scottish Land Commission, Crown Estate Scotland and Royal Botanic Garden within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Palestine

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business this evening is a members' business debate on motion S6M-13609, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on immediate recognition of the state of Palestine.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes calls urging the UK Government to join its European neighbours, Ireland, Spain and Norway, in immediately recognising the State of Palestine; understands that 144 member states of the United Nations recognise Palestine as a sovereign state; believes that a two-state solution is the only viable path for peace between Israel and Palestine, and that there can only be a two-state solution if a sovereign Palestinian state is immediately recognised and co-exists alongside Israel; further believes that Palestinian statehood is an inalienable right of the people of Palestine, not a privilege that can be vetoed by others; notes in horror the continued suffering of the people of Gaza; commends aid organisations, and community groups across Scotland, including in Glasgow Pollok, which are donating funds and sending aid to ease the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza; notes the calls urging the Government of Israel to allow unimpeded access to Gaza for humanitarian aid, and further notes the calls for an immediate ceasefire, an end to arms sales to Israel and the immediate release of all hostages.

18:25

Humza Yousaf (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP): I thank members from across the Parliament for supporting my motion today and for taking time out of their busy campaign diaries to speak on this most important of issues.

During my last speech from the front bench, I promised to continue speaking up for those whose voices have been suppressed. I hope that today's motion is a clear demonstration of my commitment to do just that. In discussions on the issue of Israel and Palestine, there has been significant focus on the dreadful terrorist attacks on 7 October and the atrocious killing of more than 35,000 Gazans thereafter. That focus is somewhat understandable, of course.

However, it is important to note that the violence and injustices in that region did not begin on 7 October last year. I do not intend to go into a detailed history of Israel and Palestine. There are far more knowledgeable people than me who have written in depth about the history of Palestine and Israel. What is indisputable, however, is that cycles of violence will continue and many more innocent people will be killed unless we address the root causes. Unfortunately, in our lifetimes, we have seen far too many innocent people, both Palestinian and Israeli, killed due to the international community's failure to bring about peace in the middle east.

At the core of that failure is a broken promise—a promise that was made as hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled by force from their homes 76 years ago. My wife’s relatives are just one of the families who had to leave their homes in the West Bank and flee to Gaza, clutching the keys to their home in their hand in the forlorn hope that, one day, they would be allowed to return.

For decades, the promise that the international community has made has been of a two-state solution. Instead of progress towards that goal, however, we have seen the systematic occupation of Palestinian land, the expansion of illegal settlements and, with it, the erasure of generations of Palestinian families. There will simply be no peace in the region until the promises that were made by the international community are kept.

Surely the most basic step towards keeping that promise has to be the formal and immediate recognition of the Palestinian state. We cannot claim to support peace but deny statehood to the Palestinian people. It is the very height of hypocrisy and duplicity for someone to say that they believe in a two-state solution but for them to only recognise one state. There are some who try to obfuscate by invoking some mythical future process that currently does not exist, saying that they will recognise Palestine only when the time is right. Let me be absolutely clear: the time to officially recognise the Palestinian state is right now. It is in no one’s gift to veto the right of the Palestinian people. It is only through the immediate recognition of Palestine that we can truly make progress towards a sovereign Palestine and Israel coexisting safely and securely alongside each other.

I was pleased to see the First Minister make that point in a recent letter to both Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer. In just over a week’s time, Keir Starmer is likely to become the next Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. My appeal to him and to the Government that he will lead is not to equivocate, and not to deny the people of Palestine their inalienable right to statehood for a second longer. Instead, they should ensure that the UK joins with our allies and neighbours, Ireland, Norway and Spain, in immediately recognising the state of Palestine. Anything less will be a betrayal of the people of Palestine, who have been let down for far too long.

For me, this has never been a question of being either pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli; it has been a question of being pro-humanity. I am left asking the question: where is our humanity? With more than 37,000 Gazans, including 14,000 children, killed—not passing away, not dying, but killed—where is our humanity? With more than 86,000 injured, where is our humanity?

The car in which six-year-old Hind Rajab was travelling when she was killed is alleged to have been hit by 335 bullets—335 bullets raining down on a car full of innocent men, women and children. Where is our humanity?

If humanity is our driving force, surely we all agree that the UK Government must end the sale of arms to Israel, and do so immediately. International Criminal Court prosecutors are seeking arrest warrants for Hamas and senior members of the Israeli Government, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The International Court of Justice is considering whether Israel has committed the gravest of crimes—genocide. Sending arms to Israel is, therefore, not only morally unjustifiable; it is complicity. We should have nothing to do with war crimes, which are undoubtedly being committed.

Accountability is the very bedrock of the global rules-based order. If arrest warrants are issued, the UK Government must make it clear that, should anyone against whom a warrant is issued—including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—land on British soil, they will be arrested, so that they can be held to account for the crimes that they have committed. We should be in no doubt that, as the United Nations has recently stated, war crimes are being committed, and it is right that those who are guilty, be they state or non-state actors, are held to account.

I conclude by asking myself: how much more suffering must people endure for the violence to cease? As I referred to already, more than 14,000 children in Gaza have been killed. According to Save the Children,

“Up to 21,000 children are estimated to be missing ... many trapped beneath rubble, detained, buried in unmarked graves, or lost from their families”.

Hospitals are being obliterated, schools destroyed and UN buildings bombed—and all of that is being live streamed into our living rooms, while political leaders fail abysmally to put an end to the violence.

We must continue to raise our voice and demand a ceasefire; demand the release of all hostages; demand an end to arms sales to Israel; demand an end to the occupation; and demand the immediate recognition of the state of Palestine. Future generations will ask us how on earth we allowed such a massacre to take place. At the very least, let us be able to say that we were on the right side of history.

18:33

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): In the only possibly lighter moment in the debate, Presiding Officer, I apologise for my slightly unconventionally accoutred appearance. I now know how Neil Gray

felt when his trousers disintegrated on him; I thought that my choice was the lesser of two evils in attending the chamber this afternoon.

I also apologise as, given the late start to the debate, I may not be able to stay until its conclusion.

Turning to the substance, I begin with the contribution from Humza Yousaf. I congratulate him on bringing the debate to the chamber. It has been some months since we last discussed the issue and, although I cannot support some of the absolute propositions in the motion that he has presented to Parliament, I can associate myself very largely with the analysis that he gave in the opening third of his speech regarding the complete failure of the international community to honour the obligations that were made long ago, and certainly at the time of the creation of the state of Israel, to a two-state solution.

What has proved to be too difficult for the minds of many in the international community has led to thousands—indeed, tens of thousands—of unnecessary deaths, and the continuation of a hugely intractable, morally indefensible and appalling international position. I think that everybody with a moral conscience, particularly now, witnessing the excess of deaths that are taking place, would find very little to disagree with in that analysis.

In my lifetime, there have been major conflicts that I thought would always be irresolvable. There were the troubles in Northern Ireland, and the Berlin wall and the conflagration in the Soviet Union—and yet, suddenly, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, both of those were resolved. In Northern Ireland, the Irish Republican Army agreed to decommission weapons and set aside its campaign of violence. The Berlin wall came down when the Soviet Union, under Mikhail Gorbachev, concluded that the international arms race could not be won.

For a moment, under the presidency of Bill Clinton, there was even the prospect that there might be progress that would lead to a more permanent settlement of the issues in the middle east. Ultimately, however, because factions there could not agree, that process fell apart, and literally nothing—I think—has been done to resolve those issues in the years since.

I am unyielding in my belief in, and support for, the state of Israel. I cannot support the proposed arms ban, because I fear that that would embolden Iran, and I am not necessarily sure what the nature of any conflict might escalate to become, were that to happen.

Nevertheless, I understand why people are concerned. I am unyielding in my support for the state of Israel, and, as I should have said, I am

enormously pleased that, through the efforts of Humza Yousaf and so many others, the Jewish community in Scotland has not suffered, as many thought that it might, any opprobrium as a result of what is happening in the middle east.

However, the third leg of the stool is the Netanyahu Government, and I have concerns—as have many in my local Jewish community—about the way in which the Netanyahu Government, from which Benny Gantz has now withdrawn, has prosecuted the conflict. I share the concerns of those who think that there are interests closer to Netanyahu's future that have allowed him to perpetuate the war in the way that he has, which is unacceptable.

We are at a point, therefore, nine months on, when we cannot simply all stand by and say, "This can go on for as long as it likes." We need to see the hostages being released, but we also have to accept that there has to be progress towards a two-state solution.

I have noted the comments by Keir Starmer, which are not so very different from those of the UK Government. I think that he has moved to say that it would be possible to recognise a Palestinian state when a process is under way, rather than, as was previously the case, when a process has concluded. That is a pragmatic move—although not one to where Mr Yousaf would like it to be. However, it would require there to be a peace process.

I also approve of all the work that Mahmoud Abbas has done in relation to trying to put in place personalities that will be able to develop that process. For the moment, however, for as long as Hamas is in place, the conflict appears to be intractable. Meanwhile, we see—as Humza Yousaf said—tens of thousands of young people being murdered during the conflict, and that, too, is unacceptable.

I think that there is—in spirit, at least—a will among members across the Parliament, irrespective of the side of the debate that we come from, to accept that what is now going on is unacceptable and that progress must be made, and that that progress must end with the recognition of a Palestinian state in a secure two-state environment within the middle east.

18:38

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Humza Yousaf for his devotion to the Palestinians, and for choosing this subject for his first members' business debate as a former First Minister; it means a lot. I also recognise the work that he has done with the Jewish community—as Jackson Carlaw highlighted—in these very difficult times.

I believe that, in international terms, the question of Palestine is the moral question of our time, and that where you stand on the injustice of the longest occupation in the world—76 years, in fact—matters. Millions of Israelis believe that too, as do many Jewish people around the world. I say that, if you have a platform to speak out, you must speak out, for the sake of all those—as Humza Yousaf said—who live in the middle east region, because it is the only way that we will get peace.

The Balfour declaration said, among other things, that the creation of the state of Israel should not undermine the rights of the Palestinian population. More than a hundred years on, however, we are no further forward on that.

As the Palestinian ambassador to the UK, Husam Zomlot, said this week at the Unison conference, the right of Palestine to be an “independent sovereign state” is an inalienable and “long-overdue right” that is not in the gift of the neighbour, who is the occupier.

As Anas Sarwar has said many times, Palestine has a right to exist as a secure state in exactly the same way as Israel should have security and peace. That is the right approach. I agree with Humza Yousaf that the time to recognise Palestine is now. It is time to correct the historical injustices.

Although the focus is, rightly, on the massacre and decimation in Gaza right now, the failure to hold Israel to account for the violation of international law over 76 years and the pretence that there were serious attempts to reach a political solution must be understood. In talks during that time, the Palestinian representatives accepted having 22 per cent of former Palestine as the basis of the state. I question whether Israel will, on its own, without any pressure, come to the conclusion that there must be a Palestinian state. That is why I believe that the UK must suspend sending arms to Israel until such time as Israel complies with international law. Unless there is pressure of that type, I do not see how that will come about.

This week, Armenia joined 146 countries that recognise Palestine as an occupied state. That is an important addition to those nations that already recognise Palestine, because there is an Armenian quarter in Jerusalem, where there is extreme settler violence, and it is a risk for the Armenians to take that step. However, the addition of Armenia to those 146 countries is welcome.

As Humza Yousaf has said, the level of violence in the occupied territories is completely unprecedented. Although the world is, rightly, focused on what is happening in Gaza, we must draw attention to what is happening in the West Bank. During his speech at the United Nations in September 2023, Benjamin Netanyahu proudly

presented a map showing all historical Palestine as Israel. However, Palestine exists and will not be ignored.

I make a plea for us not to make the mistake of characterising Benjamin Netanyahu as the problem. Previous Israeli Prime Ministers have failed to reach agreement with the Palestinians. The Palestinians have been repeatedly dehumanised, their rights have been taken away, they have been detained and their houses have been demolished. Why should they live a minute longer under Israeli rule?

Save the Children said that 20,000 children are “lost, disappeared, detained, buried under the rubble or in mass graves”.

They have nowhere to run. Now, one in four children is starving to death, and 90 per cent are food insecure when they should be receiving aid. The Rafah crossing has now been burned, and their connection with the outside world is no longer there.

We must not relent from calling for an immediate ceasefire. We must continue to call for the return of the hostages who are still being held.

One day, Palestine will be free, and I think that this Parliament can say that, when the time was right, we stood up for Palestinians and for the creation of an independent Palestinian state, and for peace for everyone who lives in the region.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As might be expected, there is a lot of interest in this debate, and it would be helpful if members could stick to their speaking time allocation, although we will almost certainly have to extend the debate in any event.

18:43

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I thank my colleague Humza Yousaf for securing this incredibly important debate. Throughout his time as an MSP, Humza Yousaf has shown unwavering support for the Palestinian people and, as First Minister, he showed immense leadership on the matter, and I commend him for that. At a time when other party leaders were running a mile from the issue, at best, or tolerating genocide and war crimes, at worst, he was on the right side of history, and he will be remembered for that.

For decades, the Palestinian people have endured prolonged conflict and illegal occupation, which have caused immense suffering and an ever-rising death toll. The lack of recognition of Palestinian statehood, despite what some might argue, has resulted in continued violence and impedes the chance of lasting peace.

Recognition of the state of Palestine acknowledges that Palestinians have the right to self-determination and the right to build a future free from occupation and oppression. The prospect of lasting peace has never been more in peril, so we must act urgently. We must secure recognition of the state of Palestine, an immediate ceasefire, an end to arms sales to Israel and the immediate release of all hostages. Immediate recognition by the UK Government would send a powerful message that we support peace and want an end to the massacre of Palestinian people.

Some people attempt to argue that recognition of the state of Palestine could undermine the peace process but, clearly, the status quo has not worked; it has only perpetuated the cycle of violence, and who are we to deny freedom to the Palestinians and condemn them to continued illegal occupation? If we believe that a two-state solution is viable, in order to get it, we must recognise the state of Palestine and allow it to co-exist with Israel.

It is our duty as MSPs to speak up against injustice and oppression and to call for action. I thank the Labour MSPs who have signed today's motion, especially as, unfortunately, it contradicts Labour's Westminster policy, which will prevail in government.

Lip service from the Tories and Labour does not cut it, and their silence has contributed to the deaths of many innocent Palestinians, including thousands of children and women. We in the SNP are clear on our stance on that. The next UK Government must recognise the state of Palestine as a matter of urgency. If it refuses to do so, the SNP will force a vote on the matter in Westminster. Instead of the need for that, we are calling on the next UK Government to follow in the footsteps of our neighbours in Ireland, Spain and Norway. The approach of our neighbouring countries is putting pressure on the Israeli Government, but we know that, unless the UK and the US announce their support for Palestinian statehood, little will change.

Recognition of the state of Palestine is in the interests of everyone, and it is necessary for lasting peace. The Palestinian and Israeli people deserve to live long, happy and peaceful lives free of continuous fear and violence. That should not be an extreme request.

The Irish Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan, put it quite simply. He said:

"What the people of Palestine ask of us is not outrageous or extravagant. If anything, it is modest. The wish to be recognised as a State like any other, to control their own affairs and to speak for themselves on the international stage."

It is that simple. Therefore, let us be on the right side of history today. Every one of us here today has a responsibility to urge the next UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine in order to bring about lasting peace and an end to the massacre.

18:47

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Like my colleagues, I thank Humza Yousaf for the moral courage and leadership that he showed in his time as First Minister and has shown throughout his time as a member of this Parliament in defending the inalienable rights of Palestinians, which many other world leaders would not defend.

In preparing for this debate, I looked back at the previous speeches that I have given in the chamber on the occupation of Palestine, and one in particular stands out. In 2018, we debated the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Nakba—the catastrophe—which was the campaign of ethnic cleansing that established the state of Israel and shattered Palestinian society. We marked that anniversary at the same time as Palestinians in Gaza marched peacefully to the fence that Israel has used to imprison them since its siege and blockade began. They marched peacefully for their freedom, and they were met by Israeli soldiers who slaughtered them. The peaceful struggle for freedom was met with colonial violence.

That year was Scotland's year of young people, and, as we were marking that, 46 Palestinian children were murdered by Israeli soldiers during those protests. They were murdered alongside paramedics wearing their uniforms. They were murdered alongside people who were shot dead in their wheelchairs. They were murdered alongside a journalist who was killed by Israeli soldiers and whom the Israeli state then claimed was a senior Hamas operative even though he had been held in prison by Hamas and was an opponent of Hamas who had passed American vetting to receive their support, because, of course, there is no lie that Israel is unwilling to stoop to telling in its constant campaign to destroy the Palestinian people.

As Humza Yousaf mentioned, Save the Children has just published a report on the toll that the past eight or nine months have taken on the children of Gaza. It says that 20,000 children are

"lost, disappeared, detained, buried under the rubble or in mass graves".

That figure comes years after the debates that we have had previously about the scale of suffering that those children have had to experience. I want to read from the remarks that I made in 2018 on the experience of those children. I said:

"Half of Gaza's population is under the age of 18. More than a decade into the siege, the UN estimates that more

than 300,000 of them need psychological support, because they are so traumatised by the atrocities that have been inflicted on them.”—[*Official Report*, 15 May 2018; c 85.]

That psychological support is now needed by every one of the 1 million children in Gaza.

In the 2014 Israeli assault, more than 500 children were killed. In the 10 years since then, world leaders have attended events to commemorate those who have been lost in previous genocides and slaughter, and they have said the same thing: “Never again.” Ten years on from those 500 children being killed, we are now looking at at least 15,000 children who have been killed.

Among those 500 children back in 2014, there were four boys from one family who, as I have mentioned previously, were murdered by Israel while they were playing football on the beach. They were killed by the Israeli Navy. They were clearly children and were clearly no threat, but they were hit not by a single stray shell but by a deliberate attack. As they fled across the beach, the Israeli ship adjusted its aim and fired a second shell to make sure that it killed all of them. Those children’s names were Ismaeel Mohamed Bakir, who was nine years old; Zakariya Aahed Bakir, who was 10; Aahed Etaf Bakir, who was 10; and Mohamed Ramez Bakir, who was 11. Their deaths were recorded by the world’s media, because they were just 200m away in a hotel. Many journalists risked their lives to try to save those children and the two others who were wounded with them. They cannot do that now, of course, because Israel has prevented international journalists from even entering Gaza. We rely on the incredible bravery of Palestinian journalists to know what is actually happening there. Not only those Palestinian journalists but their families are being targeted by the state of Israel.

Israel is the only country in the world to summarily prosecute children through a military court system—not Israeli children, of course; just Palestinian children. Those who object to Israel being labelled as an apartheid state must explain why Palestinian children and Israeli children are held to such different standards.

I recognise that we do not have much time in this debate, so I will finish with a plea to the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government could still take further action to support the Palestinian people. It could ban the companies that are listed by the UN as being complicit in the occupation from receiving grants and contracts. Palestinians have the right to self-determination. Recent events have shown the double standards that are applied to international law and human rights, but we can still stand up for our Palestinian friends. We can defend their right to a free, independent and sovereign Palestinian state.

18:52

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I have stood here twice before to condemn the terrorist attack on 7 October and the inhumane horrors that have taken place since and which continue to unfold. Standing here for a third time is heartbreaking.

To date, the conflict has claimed the lives of more than 37,000 Palestinians. The UN’s latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification report shows that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians face catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity involving

“an extreme lack of food, starvation, and exhaustion”.

The conflict is out of control and is engulfing the West Bank, as shown by the awful images of a wounded Palestinian strapped to the bonnet of an Israeli military jeep speeding past ambulances rushing to the latest scene. The war threatens the entire region, as the bellicose Israeli leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, casually states that Israeli forces will soon move on to the Lebanon border.

This has all got to stop. The collective punishment of Palestinians must end. By denying Palestinian statehood internationally, we are all complicit in that collective punishment. I have Israeli friends who support ending the outrageous treatment of their neighbours, and they deserve our support.

I commend my colleague Humza Yousaf for lodging the motion before us. It states:

“Palestinian statehood is an inalienable right of the people of Palestine, not a privilege that can be vetoed by others”.

We must halt the endless cycle of violence and bloodshed, start a viable path for peace between Israel and Palestine, and immediately recognise a Palestinian state. That is essential. We need an end to the conflict, an end to the flagrant flouting of international law and an end to the complicity of an enabling UK state. The people whom we represent want to see that. However, as people in the UK prepare to vote, the silence around the UK’s position on Palestine is shameful.

When reading a recent article on Palestine by *The Guardian* columnist Owen Jones, I was struck by the opening line. It was a simple question:

“Is this a serious country or not?”

The simple answer is that it is not.

The outgoing Prime Minister has given his full backing to Israel’s genocidal response to the 7 October attacks. He is happy to flout the rulings of the globally recognised International Court of Justice by continuing to provide arms and enable Israel to conduct its on-going Rafah offensive, in flagrant breach of the ICJ ruling. Since the ruling,

the International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu and others. Meanwhile, the UK states that the ICC has no jurisdiction, in wilful ignorance of the reality that, as a signatory to the Rome statute, the ICC does, in fact, have the power to investigate and issue rulings.

Recognising a Palestinian state would remove any of that wilful ignorance. That is why it is so important to do so, and to do so now. Recognising a Palestinian state would also furnish Palestine with the same rights and obligations of any state, so it would provide Palestine with equality in negotiations with Israel to create a future as an equal partner, demanding of and obligated to peace—a serious peace, a lasting peace and a just peace.

If we are to be a serious country, we must recognise that, we must respect international law and we must immediately join the 143 UN states that have voted to recognise the state of Palestine.

18:56

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am pleased to speak on behalf of Scottish Liberal Democrats in today's incredibly important debate. I thank Humza Yousaf for bringing the debate to the chamber and for how, as First Minister, he chose to use that office and his voice to speak up for peaceful solutions.

We have all looked on in horror at the scenes of devastation that have played out in Israel and Gaza. The terrorist attacks on 7 October and the subsequent conflict in Gaza have seen thousands of innocent people killed, and it has been horrifying. Right now, there is a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza—the health system has collapsed and international institutions are warning of the risk of famine. There is also the tragic ongoing hostage crisis, with more than 100 Israelis still being held hostage by Hamas following the atrocities of 7 October.

We are very concerned about the way in which the conflict that has turned the entire region into a tinderbox is on the brink of serious escalation. For months, Liberal Democrats have been calling for an immediate bilateral ceasefire, because we urgently need to stop the humanitarian devastation in Gaza, get the hostages out and make the space for a political process that leads to a two-state solution and lasting peace. Not only that, but an immediate bilateral ceasefire will help to deliver the de-escalation that the region desperately needs.

At this dark moment, the UK Government should be doing all that it can to stop the violence, secure an immediate bilateral ceasefire and bring about a two-state solution. One of the strongest

cards that the United Kingdom holds is the ability to immediately recognise Palestine as a state, and it is time for us to do so. Liberal Democrats have long called for the immediate recognition of the state of Palestine; it has been our policy since 2017. Layla Moran, the first British Palestinian MP, has on multiple occasions introduced a private member's bill in the UK Parliament that would recognise Palestine as a state.

The UK has both historical obligations in the region and modern responsibilities under international law. There are those who say that recognising the state of Palestine would be meaningless and that it would not have any practical consequence, but it is important that we do not underestimate the extent to which the UK's voice is listened to in the region. If we and our allies recognise Palestine, we will be able to fully join international institutions such as the UN and the World Bank. That step would provide hope for millions of Palestinians that peace and a Palestinian state are possible.

Liberal Democrats have also urged the UK Government to cease the export of British arms to Israel, given the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Liberal Democrats have long advocated a two-state solution. A lasting peace is the only way to deliver the security and dignity that Israelis and Palestinians deserve. For the security of both peoples, Hamas cannot be allowed to continue to be in charge of Gaza, international law must be upheld and the rulings of international courts must be respected.

18:59

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank Humza Yousaf for bringing this important motion to Parliament.

We have a direct historic responsibility for the injustice perpetrated on Palestine and on the Palestinians. Therefore, we have a direct and distinctive responsibility for securing justice for Palestine and the Palestinians, for without justice there will be no lasting peace. Arthur James Balfour, the British foreign secretary, born only 25 miles from here in East Lothian, declared in 1917 that

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

That single sentence signalled that imperial Britain was prepared to give away a land that did not belong to it, though with the condition—and let me repeat it—

“that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities”.

Frantz Fanon, the political radical, wrote in “The Wretched of the Earth”:

“When we revolt it’s not for a particular culture. We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe”.

I say the people of Palestine are in revolt because they can no longer breathe. In 1947, they lost more than half of their land in the UN partition plan, and three quarters of a million Palestinians were displaced at the start of the Nakba. This was not a one-off event; it grinds on and on to this day as many of those who have been dispossessed and displaced by force and their descendants are now forcibly dispossessed and forcibly displaced again inside Gaza.

Since 2008 there have been five—five—major conflicts and wars in Gaza. Settler colonisation in the West Bank has grown at the fastest rate ever; there are now half a million settlers living there. This cannot carry on.

Now the Palestinians are facing dispossession again, are being forced into exile again, are being forced to become refugees again. Yet, like so many already living in the refugee camps of Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, and those scattered across the world, many will hold keys—literally hold the physical keys of their homes—and all of them will hold the dream of one day returning.

So, of course, we condemn the attacks of October the 7th, but history did not begin on October the 7th 2023. So we need our Government to use its influence as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, because of that historic, that distinctive, that direct responsibility to ensure that aid is escalated and arming is not just de-escalated but stopped altogether—not one more drone, not one more gun, not one more bullet, not one more licence.

But we need to go further. The plight of the Palestinians is not simply a humanitarian emergency. The question of Palestine can only be answered politically. So let us understand in full this injustice. Let us accept in full the part which our country played in that. Let us face up in full to the future that this is not just a question of power in a post-colonial age; this is not just a question of human and civil rights—this is a question of our moral code, our moral responsibility, our moral duty. So let us join with those on the right side of history today: let us recognise Palestine now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. Before calling the next speaker I am conscious that a number of members still wish to participate in the debate. I am therefore minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3 of standing orders to

extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Humza Yousaf to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by 30 minutes.—[*Humza Yousaf*]

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now call James Dornan, to be followed by Carol Mochan. You have up to four minutes, Mr Dornan.

19:04

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): We could spend our allotted time listing the countless cases of the deliberate slaughter of men, women and children during and since the events of 7 October and could easily pretend that all the acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing that have occurred since then are a result of that day.

However, to do that would be to live in a world that denies facts and denies the history of both that region and of the United Kingdom. Without the betrayal of the indigenous population of Palestine, primarily by the British, we would not be here, so recognising the state of Palestine is the very least that the UK owes its people.

I well remember hearing about the horrors of 7 October last year and imagining the fear that those poor young people who were out enjoying themselves at a music festival must have felt when terror arrived. I suspect that I am not alone in having seen my sympathies lie with the people of Israel on that and the following days.

However, I would also bet that I was not alone in fearing what would happen next. We are told that Mossad is the greatest intelligence agency in the world and that the Israel Defense Forces is the most moral army yet, strangely, those two organisations were completely unable to find the culprits who carried out the 7 October terrorist acts. Instead, Netanyahu, a man who hangs on to power solely to stay out of prison, decided that it was time to clear out the people of Gaza once and for all. He set the dogs on the innocents in a pretendy attempt to root out the guilty, and he okayed the slaughter of children, women and the elderly because he saw them as being less important than his own future. Do you know what is worse than that? He got international backing to do so. While he was bombing safe havens, hospitals and refugee camps, the UK and the USA happily continued supporting him, including by selling him weapons, all for domestic political purposes.

It is fitting that today’s debate has been brought to the chamber by my friend and colleague Humza Yousaf. When the events of 7 October happened, he was the first to show support to the Jewish

community of Scotland and was joined in that by all the other political leaders. When the genocide began, Humza stood up for the people of Gaza but, that time, he was alone. While other leaders awaited instructions from elsewhere, Humza stood up and stood strong. We should never forget the humanity that he showed and the courage that it took to make himself visible like that. Of course, he did all that while he had family under the threat of the ethnic cleansing that was taking place. That is the mark of a good man.

The conflict in Palestine has been a long one, although last year's events saw it escalate to new levels of violence. I am sure that those whose memories go back that bit further than the latest news cycle will know that Palestine has been slowly and methodically annexed by illegal settlers, backed by the Israeli army, for decades. According to the UN, between 2008 and 2021, 23 Palestinians were killed for every Israeli, of which 22 per cent were children and 10 per cent were women.

No killing is a good thing, but those figures are a sharp reminder of the military imbalance in the area. The Palestinians now face the might of a US and UK backed Israeli army that seems to be intent on committing war crime after war crime, and ultimately genocide, in an attempt to ethnically cleanse the region. It is to the eternal shame of the UK Government that it continues backing the Netanyahu regime that has carried out such atrocities in Palestine and is still doing so daily. Given Keir Starmer's comments, I do not hold out much hope of an incoming Labour Government being any different.

The SNP has a long and honourable tradition of believing in the right of all nations to self-determination and the right to govern themselves in their own interests. We believe that Palestine is a nation and that the United Kingdom should immediately recognise it as a state. That is undoubtedly what we would do if Scotland were independent and it is what our neighbours in Ireland, Spain and Norway have done.

The situation in Gaza has been a humanitarian disaster, with food convoys being shot at and aid workers murdered by Israeli forces. The first step on the way out of that barbarity is to recognise Palestine as a sovereign state in its own right. A two-state solution must be brokered and either the UK is part of the solution, along with our friends and neighbours in Europe and beyond, or it will once again, as we have seen so often in its dark imperial history, be a large part of the problem. We know that 146 UN countries recognise Palestine. Will the UK make it 147?

19:09

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Humza Yousaf for bringing this important debate to the chamber. At a time when eyes have begun to turn away from the atrocities and horrors that are being inflicted on the people of Palestine, it is important that we in Parliament continue to raise their voices.

I, along with many members from across the chamber, believe that Palestine is the moral question of our time and that this is not just a matter of standing up for a ceasefire in the here and now. As others have said in this and previous debates in the chamber, more than 75 years after Palestinians were promised a state of their own and after 56 years of illegal occupation, more than 100 countries now recognise Palestine. It is not out of step for them to do so.

Where one stands on the question matters. It matters because we must care about the future for Israel and Palestine. The hopes and the futures of all Israelis and Palestinians depend on what we do.

As a citizen of one of the most powerful countries in the world, I feel desperately ashamed that UK-funded weapons have been used to perpetuate this terrible episode in human history. No amount of gross domestic product is worth being involved in that. We need security and peace for the region. Internationally, we need to place pressure on the Netanyahu Government, which all in the chamber recognise.

As others have done, I have wept as entire families have been killed in Gaza. Children have woken up to find the refugee camps that they are living in with barely enough food or water completely ablaze after bombs were dropped on tents. Aid workers and journalists have been murdered in cold blood for simply trying to help people or to get to the truth. All that is going on as we speak, and it will still be happening tomorrow. How can we do anything other than speak up? We have a moral responsibility to do so.

As others have said, we need to recognise the root causes and address them. That requires us to recognise a Palestinian state and a two-state solution. The reality of the situation as it stands is that innocent people, including thousands of women, children and unborn children are being punished for a crime that they did not commit.

I thank Mr Yousaf for the stance that he took when he was First Minister, which was most welcome. He welcomed the support from Scottish Labour and across the chamber, and I believe that that reflected the overwhelming view in Scotland that we must strive for peace and reconciliation. Scotland must continue to use its voice whenever it can to draw attention to the plight of the

Palestinians. We cannot let it be swept under the carpet, because it is that kind of attitude that has led to the constant instability in the region and the rise of leaders who are determined to use violence to get what they want.

I end by saying this to Governments around the world: selling weapons to a nation that is indiscriminately bombing civilian population centres is not a benign act. We have seen unimaginable scenes from Gaza of destruction and death. Across the world, we must speak out: stop the killing, bring the hostages home and recognise the state of Palestine so that we can begin the process of peace.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Maggie Chapman as the final speaker in the open debate for up to four minutes.

19:13

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I am grateful to Humza Yousaf for lodging his motion and for securing the debate in the chamber. I echo other members' comments that recognise his leadership on the issue.

I know that many people around Scotland will be watching us to see what we in Parliament say and do about the awful genocide that is wreaking death and destruction across Gaza. I believe that those of us who have consistently been calling for a ceasefire for more than eight months, and for the world to recognise the state of Palestine for much longer than that, will, in time, be shown to have been on the right side of history.

We desperately need peace in the lands of Palestine and Israel—and it must be a just peace. The on-going conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has roots that go back more than a century. A peaceful resolution, although not simple, is a moral imperative. We come to the debate after the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians, the murder of children and healthcare workers and the destruction of hospitals, universities, libraries and schools. We come to the debate at a time when Israeli occupation forces have used an injured Palestinian as a human shield, strapped to the front of a military vehicle. We come to the debate when Israel is not just bombarding Gaza but restricting services and support across the occupied territories.

Israel has stopped transferring tax that is collected from Palestinians to the Palestinian National Authority, so public sector workers have not been paid for months. Israel was given control over Palestinian tax and customs in the Oslo accords in the 1990s. The Oslo process saw the then Palestinian Liberation Organisation recognise the state of Israel. Indeed, the PLO did what was asked of it in those accords, but it was consistently

undermined by the forces of occupation and apartheid, as the Palestinian Authority has been. Education is an inalienable human right, but the education of young Palestinians is being restricted because the Palestinian Authority has not received the money that it needs to pay teachers' wages, if, indeed, they still have schools to teach in. The same restrictions apply to healthcare, which is another inalienable human right.

I will say a bit about the attacks on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East—UNRWA. When the International Court of Justice instructed Israel to ensure that sufficient aid was provided in Gaza, the immediate response was not to make that aid available but to claim that UNRWA was implicated in the 7 October attacks. No evidence of that has ever been produced. More UN workers have been killed in this war than in any other. Hundreds of aid installations have been destroyed and damaged, which has compromised UNRWA's ability to do its life-saving work.

International humanitarian law—particularly the Geneva convention—emphasises the protection and assistance of civilians. Defunding and otherwise compromising UNRWA's attempts undermines those protections. We must apply all the international pressure that we can on Israel to stop it from acting in bad faith, and so that the UK and the US reinstate support for UNRWA, stop sending arms to Israel and recognise the state of Palestine. A just peace cannot be achieved by the obliteration of a people and the destruction of their world.

I have a different position to others on the issue of a two-state solution, one that is shared by many workers for peace in Israel and Palestine. The occupation of east Jerusalem makes such a proposal unworkable, I believe, as do the illegal settlements in the West Bank. I urge colleagues to read Jeff Halper's writing on that. However, that difference does not diminish my support for the immediate recognition of the state of Palestine, for an end to supplying arms to Israel and for a ceasefire. The Palestinian people should be given the power and the means to determine their own future.

To conclude, I will share the words of Shahed Bdeir, a 13-year-old Palestinian child whose poem, "Mother Palestine", has been on display in the Scottish Poetry Library as part of the Hands Up Project's "Moon Tell Me Truth" exhibition:

"Sadness in her eyes
as everyone dies
She remembers the old days
How beautiful she was
But no one can realize
that she wants to survive
Everyone, everywhere, must realize
that Palestine deserves life."

19:17

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I thank Humza Yousaf for securing this important debate. I pay tribute to him for his principled stance on the issue as minister, cabinet secretary, First Minister and, today, as a member of the Scottish Parliament. He has been a voice for victims of this terrible conflict from the very beginning, as well as an advocate of tolerance at home and of speaking out against all forms of discrimination, including Islamophobia and antisemitism. I also pay tribute to all members who have spoken so powerfully in the debate.

The Scottish Government has welcomed Ireland, Norway, Spain and Slovenia's recognition of the state of Palestine; they have joined with 141 other states in doing so. Today, we were updated that the Republic of Armenia has done likewise. The First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition on 28 May to call on the United Kingdom to do the same. I reiterate that call for the UK to review its position following the recent, welcome decision by our European neighbours. Recognition would offer hope to Palestinians that a just, durable political solution is possible, and it would allow Israel and Palestine to move towards long-term peace and stability, which is in the interest of all parties.

Although it may sometimes seem like a distant prospect, the Scottish Government continues to support the position of the UK and the European Union that there should be a two-state solution that respects the human rights of everyone in the region to ensure that a secure Israel can live peacefully alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. Only through such an outcome can the cycle of violence that is killing and injuring so many innocent civilians be ended.

The Scottish Government has been consistent in condemning unequivocally the abhorrent terrorist actions of Hamas and in calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, by all sides, in Israel and in Gaza. A ceasefire is the only way that we can halt the catastrophic human suffering in Gaza and for all the hostages to be released.

I repeat the Scottish Government's demand for Hamas to release immediately and unconditionally all hostages and to cease all missile attacks against Israel. Hamas can have no future in Gaza. The cycle of violence must end, the rockets and bombings must stop, humanitarian and medical facilities must be protected, and civilians must be given unrestricted access to the basic necessities of life, wherever they are.

I take the opportunity to commend the generosity of aid organisations and community groups across Scotland, including in Humza

Yousaf's constituency of Glasgow Pollok, for their generosity in sending aid to ease the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. That generosity is consistent with the outpouring of support that ordinary Scots have provided for innocent victims of conflict elsewhere, most recently in Ukraine. The Scottish Government has also responded to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza by committing £750,000 of Scotland's international aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's flash appeal.

Having been repeatedly displaced, an estimated 1.3 million Palestinians are sheltering in tent camps and cramped apartments, desperate for food, desperate for water and desperate for medical supplies. The health system, along with much of the infrastructure in Gaza, has been decimated. Life-saving aid has been systematically blocked from entering the territory, in contravention of international law. The International Court of Justice has been crystal clear that Israel must ensure unimpeded access to Gaza for humanitarian aid.

I urge all parties to step up their efforts to agree a ceasefire urgently, so that the hostages can at last be reunited with their families, the bombing can stop and the unimaginable suffering that this conflict has caused can finally end.

The Scottish Government does not believe that there is a case to send more weapons to Israel. The UN Security Council has called for a ceasefire in Gaza, and ministers have made it clear that, by continuing to arm Israel, the UK is in danger of being complicit in killing innocent civilians. The former First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister calling for a ban on arms exports to Israel—a call that has not yet been heeded. We will continue to press the UK Government on that issue.

Today, in this Parliament, we have overwhelmingly agreed that Palestine must be recognised as an independent state. Doing nothing is not an option. The UK should join the international community and do the right thing—recognise Palestine as an independent state and secure a ceasefire and a two-state solution, so that Palestine and Israel can live in peace, security, prosperity and independence.

Meeting closed at 19:22.

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