



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

# Meeting of the Parliament

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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 4 March 2025*

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leader is Martha Inés Romero, secretary general of Pax Christi International.

**Martha Inés Romero (Pax Christi International):** Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the opportunity to lead time for reflection today. Good afternoon, everyone. I am Martha Inés Romero, a Colombian peace practitioner serving the Pax Christi International movement as secretary general.

Pax Christi is a global peace movement that has been working worldwide since 1945. Today, 80 years later, we continue promoting peace by active non-violence and education and by promoting human rights, restorative justice, ecological sustainability and reconciliation. The peace that is sought by Pax Christi stems from a recognition of the innate dignity of all of the planet and of every human person, and the autonomous rights of peoples. Pax Christi International has promoted a spirituality that is rooted in an absolute belief in the dignity and worth of every human and the observance of social justice.

With a network of over 100 grass-roots organisations globally, Pax Christi addresses the root causes and consequences of violent conflicts, scaling local community voices from the peripheries in global conversations at the decision-making tables for context-specific solutions. Pax Christi has a fundamental message: only through non-violence can we build a more peaceful world.

In many places around the world, the humanitarian crisis is severe, and people are suffering the causes of the increasing budgets for war and the many interests in natural resources through extractivism—mining, agrobusinesses and others—not for the common good, but for corporates' interests. We accompany those communities in Latin America, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region to defend their right to live their culture in their lands.

Pax Christi International promotes a global ethic of non-violence through its Catholic non-violence initiative and is also a steadfast advocate for nuclear disarmament. With the working group on

disarmament and integral human security, we campaign for the elimination of nuclear weapons and the promotion of a nuclear-free world, supporting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, raising awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear warfare, and collaborating with other peace organisations—we belong to the Nobel peace prize-winning International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons—to lobby Governments and the United Nations for concrete steps towards integral disarmament of nuclear and small weapons.

Those issues could be discussed in more detail at the parliamentary reception this evening in an event that is co-sponsored by Pax Christi Scotland, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, Justice for Colombia Scotland and the Catholic Bishops Justice and Peace Commission. All members of the Scottish Parliament are especially invited.

Thank you very much for your attention. Tapadh leibh.

## Business Motion

14:03

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

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-16684, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to the business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for Tuesday 4 March 2025—

after

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

insert

*followed by* First Minister's Statement: International Solidarity to Support Ukraine

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Topical Question Time

14:04

**Temporary Accommodation (Impact on Children)**

1. **Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the report, "In Their Own Words: Children's Experiences in Temporary Accommodation", which was commissioned by Shelter Scotland and shows the impact that a stay in temporary accommodation can have on children's safety, health and education. (S6T-02391)

**The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan):** No child should have to stay in accommodation that negatively affects their health, and it will have been hard for families to share those experiences.

The number of children in temporary accommodation is still too high, but our actions are making progress. Our latest statistics show that 20 councils reduced the number of children in temporary accommodation in 2023-24. We have targeted £42 million of funding at the local authorities that have the most sustained pressures, which has supported them to bring 1,000 homes back into use through acquisitions and reducing the number of empty social homes.

**Miles Briggs:** From listening yesterday to the voices of those children, it is clear that many young people are placed in totally unacceptable, poor-quality temporary accommodation. We need the Scottish Government to do more to address that.

The research demonstrates the detrimental impact that poor-quality accommodation is having on children's health and safety. All members who were at the event yesterday heard that. Why has the Scottish Government not provided standards of accommodation for the temporary accommodation sector? Will it take that forward in the Housing (Scotland) Bill?

**Paul McLennan:** We are taking forward a number of decisive actions. I mentioned the acquisitions funding. Mr Briggs has previously mentioned Edinburgh. We have taken action with the City of Edinburgh Council to reduce voids by 55 per cent.

I mentioned areas that are facing sustained pressure. There has been a 25 per cent reduction in West Lothian, a 20 per cent reduction in South Lanarkshire and a 23 per cent reduction in Fife. We are taking action in working with local authorities, and we are increasing the affordable housing supply programme budget to £768 million.

On the quality of temporary accommodation, local authorities are expected to work towards meeting the standards that are outlined in the Scottish Government's temporary accommodation standards framework. We continue to have those discussions as we target acquisitions and voids.

**Miles Briggs:** I think that the minister would draw the same conclusion from yesterday's evidence as the rest of us did: that is not happening. Children are reporting antisocial behaviour in the residences that they are staying in. Rats in cots are being reported. That is totally unacceptable. Clearly, the emergency response that the Scottish Government said that it would bring has not happened. There are 10,360 children in temporary accommodation, which is a 150 per cent increase over the past 10 years.

When it comes to education, there is a very specific ask in the report, which is in relation to children being relocated and therefore having to change schools. Given that the minister says that he works across portfolio with other colleagues, why has the Government not outlined a policy specifically on a presumption against children being moved from their school?

**Paul McLennan:** We have taken a number of actions on that. I have previously mentioned the ministerial oversight group, in which I meet ministerial colleagues to discuss the issue, and actions are being taken forward—for example, on flipping. I have had constituents mention the same issue.

Another action that we are taking is a focus on houses for families who have a larger number of children. We are focusing on that through the voids and acquisitions discussions.

I come back to my point about the temporary accommodation standards: we are continuing to press local authorities to make sure that they match those.

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** In addition to the total service costs and rents that we know lead to the very high cost of being homeless, one parent featured in the report spoke of spending £600 on transport every month to get their children to school or appointments. Others detailed the cost of inadequate cooking facilities and the burden of repeatedly purchasing essential items such as fridges. Some older children spoke of potentially losing their education maintenance allowance, because they were at a higher risk of missing school. In light of that, how will the Scottish Government help to ensure that living in temporary accommodation does not carry an additional financial penalty for children and families in particular?

**Paul McLennan:** Emma Roddick has brought up a number of issues. When it comes to

temporary accommodation and housing, we have to look at the overall support from the Scottish Government. The Scottish child payment is the only such payment in the United Kingdom, which sets us apart from others.

In addition, the local housing allowance was a key point that was discussed yesterday. Local housing allowance covers the 30th percentile of rents in a given area as an absolute minimum. The UK Government's decision to freeze rates from 1 April 2025 has therefore put more pressure on families that move into that sector. The Resolution Foundation estimates that permanently repegging rates to the 30th percentile would lift 75,000 children out of poverty by the end of this UK Parliament. I wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in January, urging her to reverse the decision to freeze rates.

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** It is absolutely appalling that, every single day, thousands of kids are living in the conditions that we hear about in the report. That is despite the Government's promises to reduce numbers. Every six months, the statistics show that the number of kids in temporary accommodation is growing and growing. Given the report's findings and the absolutely awful conditions that children are living in, can the minister give a guarantee that, when the next set of statistics is released, we will see a reduction in the number of children living in temporary accommodation?

**Paul McLennan:** I think that we are starting to see some investment around, for example, voids and acquisitions. I mentioned the reduction in voids that we have had in Fife, West Lothian, South Lanarkshire and Edinburgh.

We have also heard about the 12 local authorities that have reduced homelessness and the 20 that have reduced homelessness in relation to children.

In the budget that has just been passed, we are also investing £768 million in this financial year to enable the delivery of around 8,000 homes. There is also the £2 million that has been made available in the budget to focus on empty homes, of which there are far too many. We continue to work with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership to turn around as many homes as we possibly can.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I am not sure that the minister has read the report. The devastating impact is really clear. In it, one mother refers to her 13-year-old son, who is living in temporary accommodation, saying that

"He is more sensitive and sad".

That is devastating and has lifelong impacts.

I do not think that the minister answered one single question that Miles Briggs posed. I will

therefore put to him two of the issues that were put forward. Will the minister impose a ban on moving children between schools, so that they cannot be moved? Will the standards framework be reviewed so that we do not end up with mouldy homes, with vermin in those properties?

**Paul McLennan:** I think that Mr Briggs made a number of points.

I was at the launch of the report yesterday and I have read it. I referred in a previous answer to flipping, which is when properties that can be used as temporary accommodation are then turned around to become permanent accommodation.

We work closely with local authorities on the housing that can be available to families—including some families who have three, four or maybe five children. Again, it is about trying to find suitable accommodation that is near the school at the particular time. I also mentioned the ministerial oversight group. I am working with colleagues on that.

I also mentioned some of the issues around homelessness. The report mentions the impact on health and, for example, the impact on a child's mental health. We are working as closely as we possibly can with local authorities in relation to flipping and on finding suitable accommodation near the child's school.

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** I also attended the launch of the hard-hitting report. I thank Shelter for commissioning research that finally gives voice to what those of us on the front line supporting families in temporary accommodation have understood for years: children experience multiple negative impacts to their wellbeing through any period in temporary accommodation, but the impacts are worsened by long periods of poor and unsuitable placements, as well as by multiple moves.

We urgently need more social homes. How can the minister and his ministerial colleagues use this critical report as a lightning rod to galvanise action across the sector to improve experiences now? Children need wraparound, personalised support, safe spaces to play in, and well-lit, fully furnished and safe accommodation near to their school and support network. That should be the rule, not the exception. Everyone who delivers temporary accommodation should be supported to view it through a children's rights-based lens.

**Paul McLennan:** I am aware that Elena Whitham was also at the event yesterday.

As has been touched on by a couple of members, housing and homelessness obviously bring their own issues, but the points about health were raised in the discussions that we had

yesterday, and they are important. The mental health issue was talked about as well. We have to make sure that there is not a long-standing impact.

On the point about the quality of accommodation, we expect there to be high-quality properties that meet the temporary accommodation standards. We are talking about how we tackle the voids issue and how we bring empty homes back into use as quickly as possible. I also mentioned the £768 million investment, which will bring houses forward at a quicker pace.

Our ending homelessness together plan is underpinned by a person-centred approach, and we expect local authorities to work to meet the needs of each household in relation to temporary and settled accommodation. For children and young people, that means reducing moves between properties, living in a home close to their school so that they can maintain social connections, and having access to outdoor areas and gardens.

We will obviously consider the recommendations in yesterday's report.



## Ukraine

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

The next item of business is a statement by John Swinney on international solidarity to support Ukraine. The First Minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:15

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Just last Monday, all of Scotland's political leaders took part in a powerful and moving ceremony at Edinburgh castle to mark three years since the start of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. We stood together with members of the Ukrainian community living here in Scotland to commemorate the time that has passed since the start of that invasion but also to reaffirm our support for the people of Ukraine. Although we disagree on points of policy and politics in this chamber—which is right and proper in a parliamentary democracy—when it comes to upholding the values and principles of modern democracy, the Scottish Parliament stands behind Ukraine, resolute and unwavering. [*Applause.*]

Regardless of our political views, everyone in this chamber understands that democracy is hard fought for and must never be taken for granted. Democracy must be cherished, defended and enhanced. That is the lesson of the 20th century and it is the lesson that the people of Ukraine live, struggle and fight to teach us every day.

The courage demonstrated by President Zelenskyy and by all Ukrainians since the first day of Russia's illegal full-scale invasion reaches far beyond the protection and preservation of their own homeland. Ukrainians struggle and fight for all of Europe and for the protection and preservation of all democratic nations. It is a struggle for the rule of law, for human rights and to uphold the international norms that once ensured that Europe knew guaranteed peace. The Ukrainian people are fighting for their homeland and their future, but for our future, too.

Three years ago, Russia expected to flatten Ukrainian resistance within days but, despite a war that has caused years of unnecessary misery in a peaceful, sovereign and democratic nation, the power of the fight for democracy and all its freedoms has given the Ukrainian people their purpose as well as their most potent advantage. Ukraine's people are fighting to defend her independence, her territorial integrity and her security in the face of appalling, unprovoked violence—violence that has destroyed lives, separated families, wounded hundreds of thousands of citizens and razed cities to the

ground—yet President Zelenskyy has not wavered in strength or dignity. His people have not laid down arms and Russia has not succeeded in reaching its war aims, despite sending hundreds of thousands of troops to their deaths, or to be wounded, on the front lines.

Now, as a result of all that unnecessary carnage, millions of Ukrainian children have never known peace, while western democracy has never been under such relentless attack from within. Misinformation, propaganda, malicious interpretations of history, arrogance, ignorance, prejudice and hate are being used to divide us. Only yesterday, after Russia launched a drone attack on a civilian building in Kharkiv, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said:

“We see that the collective West has started to become less collective. A fragmentation of the collective West has begun.”

That is precisely what Russia wants its people and the world to believe and it is precisely what Putin wants us to believe. We must be ever vigilant to the threat of disinformation, which takes the shape of the Kremlin's talking points.

Russia was not provoked to invade Ukraine, in 2014 or in 2022. No credence should be given to deflection tactics that blame NATO expansion for Russian aggression. Each and every country in NATO is a democracy that has made its own sovereign choice to become a member, and many of the countries on NATO's eastern flank have recent experience of living under Russian threat.

The strong international solidarity and dedication to achieving peace in Ukraine was evident for all to see at the security summit in London this weekend. The vast majority of European leaders have only one message—their unreserved condemnation of illegal Russian aggression.

Therefore, Ukraine's allies should all have one aim and one aim only—to support Ukraine's independence, her territorial integrity and her security. I whole-heartedly welcome the Prime Minister's “coalition of the willing” initiative to provide Ukraine with security guarantees after a ceasefire agreement, as well as the £1.6 billion missile deal for Ukraine. I also accept the case for peacekeeping forces to avert further conflict, subject to proper scrutiny and a vote in the House of Commons, and I understand the delicate balance of diplomacy that the Prime Minister and the United Kingdom Government must navigate in this matter.

I make clear my commitment and the commitment of my Government to a united front and to doing all that I can to support Ukraine to succeed. However—like the many European leaders who expressed their solidarity with

President Zelenskyy this weekend, I am sure—I am very disturbed by how his meeting with the US President and Vice President played out last week. I agree with President Zelenskyy's statement that Ukraine wants its partners

“to remember who the aggressor is in this war.”

We must see unwavering unity across the political spectrum in full solidarity with Ukraine on that essential point. The events at the Oval office meeting with President Zelenskyy and the announcement that was made this morning of a pause in US military aid to Ukraine can only run the risk of emboldening Russia—the aggressor. As I said this weekend, if that were to remain the posture of the US Government, a second state visit for US President Donald Trump would become unthinkable. I know that there are people in this chamber and across this country who will disagree—people who will say that we should not contemplate this stance or who will say that President Trump should not be invited under any circumstances. I understand and respect those points of view but I cannot share them.

Right now, today, as we stand here, men, women and children in Ukraine are putting their lives and their freedom on the line to defend their country and all our democracies. We say that we support them, and we do, but that means being willing to do things that are hard—things that we would rather not do. So, if a state visit could help to solidify US support for Ukraine—if that is part of what supporting Ukraine means in practice—it is a possibility. For that to be true, however, the US would have to sustain the steadfast support of Ukraine, her independence and her territorial integrity.

As we think through all these issues, the important questions are the hard-headed, clear-eyed consideration of what is best for Ukraine and for European security today. For my Government, that means standing steadfast behind Ukraine and alongside the United Kingdom Government and our European allies, and that is exactly what Scotland will do.

My hope is that US and European leaders can once again find a way to speak with one voice on the matter of this conflict. There are no grey areas when one country chooses to send troops and tanks into the peaceful territory of another. My Government supports the approach of the United Kingdom Government in committing to secure international solidarity in support of Ukraine's long-term future. We welcome the 100-year partnership that was recently agreed by the United Kingdom and Ukraine, and Scotland will play our part, whether as part of the United Kingdom or as an independent nation in the future, in helping to deliver it.

I also welcome the approach of the Prime Minister and the proposed four-point plan to end the war and defend Ukraine from Russia. As I have already stated, Scotland accepts the case for the deployment of any peacekeeping forces to avert future conflict, subject to scrutiny and a vote by members of Parliament in the House of Commons. My Government remains committed to supporting Ukraine until a just peace is secured—not a peace at any cost, which strips Ukraine of her sovereignty in wartime.

Let me once again make clear that there can be no truly sincere or constructive peace talks about the future of Ukraine without Ukraine being present at the negotiating table and that securing the future of Ukraine is utterly vital to securing the peace that we have enjoyed in Europe for so long. Ukraine's future and her fate is our future and our fate, so we must aspire to be as courageous as the people of Ukraine and stand by them, always, in their hour of need.

We must maintain unity with our partners across Europe and the western world—unity like that demonstrated in London this weekend and at Edinburgh castle last week—because events in Ukraine are having, and will continue to have, a direct negative impact on Scotland's economy, security and society. Scotland's approach internationally will continue to be led and guided by our compassion for Ukraine. I know that members in the chamber will continue to work together on these matters and to put any differences aside in respect of our common efforts to uphold justice.

Now, 25 years into the life of this modern Parliament, Scotland chooses to stand for democracy, for human rights and the rule of law, at home and among our courageous allies such as Ukraine. Those are the underpinnings of democracy, of prosperity, and of every freedom that democracy provides. That is the solidarity among allies that will deliver Ukraine from Russia's barbaric aggression, while protecting her heritage, her culture and her social and economic future.

We have, across Scotland, been honoured that thousands of Ukrainians have made their home in our country. My message to people from Ukraine who are living here in Scotland, is that you are, and always will be, very welcome here. Providing support and sanctuary for Ukrainian people who have been displaced by Russia's brutal war continues to be a priority for the Scottish Government. I want Ukrainians everywhere to know that they also have Scotland's fullest support; I know that many of them will be deeply concerned by what has unfolded over the past few days. It is for those brave Ukrainians, and every person who is protected by democracy, that

Scotland will never be silent. Here in Scotland, we will, forever, stand with Ukraine. *[Applause.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** The First Minister will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 30 minutes for questions. It would be helpful if members who wish to put a question were to press their request-to-speak buttons.

**Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** We are honoured to be joined today, in the public gallery, by the consul of Ukraine in Edinburgh. *[Applause.]*

For more than a century, the United Kingdom and the United States have been the strongest of friends and allies, our bonds forged by shared values of freedom and democracy. During the first and second world wars, we fought alongside other allies to defeat fascism. In the cold war, our unity and resolve prevented the very real threat of a third world war and defeated the tyranny of the Soviet Union.

Today, however, the old alliances that have endured throughout our lifetimes do not seem as certain. Last week's disturbing public disagreement between the Presidents of the United States and Ukraine feels seismic. For the sake of the heroic people of Ukraine, who are suffering slaughter at Putin's hands, politicians in this country should recognise the responsibility that we have. It is critically important that we do whatever we can to repair, rather than exacerbate, those rifts. Grandstanding comments such as those from some senior Scottish National Party politicians are self-indulgent and counterproductive. They risk sowing divisions between western allies, to the delight of the Kremlin and other despotic and dangerous regimes.

Today, the First Minister rightly points out that Russia wants a fragmented west. We have seen Russia's interference in Scottish politics and across Europe, so, when John Swinney suggested that President Trump's state visit should be cancelled, how did he think that that would help fragile western unity? Today, he says that the visit should be conditional on the US sustaining

"the steadfast support of Ukraine, her independence and her territorial integrity."

Does the First Minister really believe that he has the power to lay down conditions on the US, lacking any meaningful detail, and effectively expect the King to heed his terms?

Finally, I ask John Swinney about his comments that our nuclear deterrent provides

"no tangible or realistic benefit"

and that nuclear weapons

"are not stopping conflict in the world today".

John Swinney is dangerously and naively wrong. Ukraine bitterly regrets forfeiting its nuclear deterrent and, during the cold war, it would have been immense folly to surrender our nuclear deterrent. With Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Europe and NATO no longer certain of what American future support might look like, that is even more true today. Does John Swinney recognise that, in these serious times, the SNP's stance on nuclear weapons is not a serious policy?

**The First Minister:** First, I associate myself with the welcome to the consul general of Ukraine. I am glad that he is here to hear these exchanges and the solidarity that we have for the people of Ukraine.

I agree with and empathise with a lot of what Russell Findlay has said. Throughout my life, I have lived through many certainties, such as the integral nature of the alliance around the western world and the foundations of solidarity between the United States and the United Kingdom, and I recognise and welcome the centrality of those relationships in creating the peace and stability that I have experienced all my life. I agree with Russell Findlay that those certainties have been weakened by the events of recent days. That poses significant questions with which we have to wrestle.

In that context, I have set out measured remarks about the importance of ensuring that, when we are trying to build those alliances, we all know where we stand. The United Kingdom's expressing the desire to extend a state visit welcome to President Trump seems to me to be the type of commitment that should be given to an ally with whom we are working in consort.

The uncertainties that Mr Findlay has talked about are uncertainties that we are all wrestling with now. That is the rationale for me setting out the view that I have set out, which is my deeply held view. It can be observed by whoever wishes to observe my view, but, in a democracy, it is right that we say what we think and what we feel. That is the essence of democracy, is it not?

On the question of nuclear weapons, I have made no secret of the fact that, in my entire life, I have not supported the possession of nuclear weapons. Indeed, concerns about the possession of nuclear weapons were one of the reasons why I decided to pursue the particular politics that I have pursued all of my adult life, in a party that has been committed to nuclear disarmament all of its days.

I simply observe to Russell Findlay that, despite all the possession of nuclear weapons today, Ukraine has been invaded. That is the reality of

what we are facing. Nuclear weapons have not deterred Russia from invading Ukraine. Indeed, the challenges that Ukraine faces—to ensure that it is able to sustain its military operations—are about conventional weaponry, of which we should have more at our disposal. Those are the arguments that I would put forward.

However, we live in a democracy in which there has to be tolerance of other people's views, which may be different from the views of others. That is why I am determined to make sure that we stand with Ukraine because, by doing so, we do all that we can to protect the democratic values that have been central to our society today.

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I join others in welcoming the consul general of Ukraine to the Parliament. I spoke to him just before we came into the chamber, and he emphasised how much it means to the great people of Ukraine to know that they have the resolute support of the people of Scotland and across the United Kingdom.

I thank the First Minister for his statement today, which I welcome. No one wanted to see the scenes that unfolded on Friday night at the White House. For three years, Ukraine, led by Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has defended itself against the odds. The world has looked on in admiration and respect as the people of Ukraine have heroically stood up to brutal Russian aggression. Last week, I, like the First Minister and other party leaders, stood with the Ukrainian community in Scotland to mark the anniversary of the Russian invasion and to commemorate the lives that have been lost.

The events of the past week were a defining moment for peace and security in Europe. They require serious grown-up leadership, not Twitter diplomacy. This is an issue of war and peace and of life and death, so politicians should not resort to childish attacks on social media for perceived party interest, but instead prioritise peace and the national interest.

Keir Starmer is right to say that he will only take actions that help to achieve peace, not actions to undermine it. That is what should guide all of us. That is why he spent the weekend meeting with President Zelenskyy and the leaders of 18 nations. The Prime Minister is assembling a coalition to find a path that will end the war and ensure that Ukraine's sovereignty is backed up by strong security guarantees. That means working together for long-term peace in Europe and taking tough decisions, such as prioritising defence spending.

Security is the first responsibility of every Government, and all our actions should be guided by the need for peace. Scotland and all of the UK stand alongside Ukraine in its hour of need. We should all recommit to the cause of peace and freedom across Europe and the cause of peace

and freedom across the world. Does the First Minister agree that, if the result of that diplomacy and those actions is lasting peace in Europe, it will be worth it?

**The First Minister:** In short, yes. I welcome the role that the Prime Minister has taken in recent months, weeks and days—particularly intensively in recent days—to try to establish a way through the very challenging situation that we now face. The engagement with European leaders and the leaders of other countries, including the Prime Minister of Canada, has been particularly effective in drawing together a body of opinion that can help to create some of the cohesion that is required to support Ukraine at this particular moment. Those discussions are fundamental to assembling the correct approach, and I have publicly made it very clear that we support the Prime Minister in his endeavours.

There will, of course, be difficult issues that flow from the plans that the Prime Minister has set out, not least the possibility of armed personnel from this country being deployed in Ukraine. That is some way off, as we all know, but it is important that we contemplate and discuss those issues properly, fully and openly as a society with democratic scrutiny, so that we can come to the right conclusions.

I fundamentally agree with Mr Sarwar that the future of European democracy is very much in play at this moment. What happens in the course of the next few days, weeks and months will shape much of the future that lies ahead of us, and we have to make sure that we take actions that will protect the democratic values that we have all experienced during our lives and which are so precious in our society today.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I join others in welcoming the consul general of Ukraine, and I recognise the impact of these discussions on Ukraine and on Ukrainians who are living in Scotland. The Scottish Greens stand fully in support of the political unity in defence of Ukraine's sovereignty that the First Minister has spoken of and which I had hoped that all political parties would express in the chamber today, instead of making party-political points.

I recognise the dignity of President Zelenskyy and his courageous display of self-respect in the face of the astonishing mistreatment that he was subjected to on Friday. [*Applause.*] He told the truth and challenged Russian propaganda.

Scotland has strong solidarity with Ukraine and is outraged at those who would abandon it to an aggressor, but these events threaten all countries, including our own. Trump's choice to realign the US with Russia and against not only Ukraine but democratic Europe is clear, and it is astonishing

that some voices in the UK's politics and media are pretending that the world has not changed fundamentally.

I want to ask the First Minister about a matter that is within his devolved responsibility. Following the US decision to cease cybersecurity operations against Russia, does he agree that he must ensure that data and systems relating to all functions of the Scottish Government and Scottish public services must be secured? Will he urgently commission a review to identify whether any current or potential US partner company should now be considered a security risk?

**The First Minister:** I will make two points in response to that. First, Patrick Harvie used the term "truth". Truth is so important in the conduct of these issues, because we all know that Ukraine, as a democratic society, was invaded by an aggressor—Russia—and nothing should be expressed that does not make that point centrally in this discussion.

Secondly, the Scottish Government keeps all issues in relation to cybersecurity under active review at all times. Indeed, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, who has responsibility for civil contingencies and resilience in the Government, briefed the Cabinet this morning on the steps that are being taken to review our posture.

The issues that we, as a society and as a country, are facing are affected by the Ukrainian conflict and the events that are taking their course. We in the Scottish Government must be satisfied—we will work closely with the United Kingdom Government in this respect—and we must be certain that we are doing all that we can to protect the resilience, resolve, capacity and capability of our country, and that includes our data systems. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs will brief the Cabinet on those issues regularly and take forward the point that we agreed this morning about the importance of that exercise being carried out.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I, too, welcome the appearance of our friend the Ukrainian consul general. Slava Ukraini. Heroyam slava.

President Zelenskyy and the people of Ukraine are heroes. They deserve sovereignty, a fair and lasting peace, and the steadfast support of the entire world. What we witnessed in the Oval office on Friday was appalling. In a premeditated act of thuggery, Vice President Vance and President Trump tried to humiliate one of the bravest leaders of our time on the international stage.

It feels as if America could be on the verge of a betrayal of Ukraine, but asking the King to withdraw the offer of a state visit would throw

away the most significant leverage that we might have to influence Trump's thinking on Ukraine and America's place in the western alliance. I welcome the First Minister's apparent movement on that in his statement today, as uncomfortable as that might be for many of us.

With the withdrawal of US aid overnight, does the First Minister agree with Liberal Democrat calls to seize the tens of billions of pounds-worth of frozen Russian assets here in the UK and use them to support Ukraine's fight for survival?

**The First Minister:** First, what I said about the state visit in my statement is what I have been saying all weekend. There is nothing different about what I said to Parliament today compared with that.

The member asked about the withdrawal of US aid and the implications in relation to financial support for Ukraine from frozen Russian assets. There is a very real difference between using the interest on frozen assets and using those frozen assets themselves. The Cabinet discussed that this morning, and it is the subject of discussion among European partners.

Given the basis on which Russia has invaded Ukraine, I think that it should be contemplated whether those frozen assets should be used to support Ukraine in its time of need. European leaders must consider those issues, and I am aware that those questions are being debated. However, it is reasonable to consider Mr Cole-Hamilton's point at a time when Russia has disregarded the rule of law. That merits a response that enables us to protect the rule of law and democracy, and those issues should therefore be considered.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** It has been an absolute privilege to welcome Ukrainian people to Scotland during this difficult time. However, in this time of increased uncertainty—particularly over the past few days—many will understandably be concerned about what the future holds for their home country. What is the First Minister's message to Ukrainian people who are living in Scotland at this difficult time?

**The First Minister:** Rona Mackay highlights the unease and anxiety that must be felt by Ukrainian citizens who are living in this country. Their lives have been turned upside down, and they are now living far from their home and from many of their loved ones. I understand the anxiety that will be felt. My message to those individuals living in our community is to express solidarity and to assure them of Scotland's support and assistance. Scotland will be absolutely true to maintaining that support and assistance to those individuals.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** The statement from the

First Minister rightly acknowledges the danger of division in our society. We all want a path to peace, but President Trump's recent decision has dealt a bitter blow to the people of Ukraine.

In light of the withdrawal of US military aid, does the First Minister accept that, at times of peril such as this, Scotland, as part of the United Kingdom, can play a crucial role in efforts to support Ukraine with our world-leading defence sector base? In the interests of global security, will he now drop his party's call to scrap Trident?

**The First Minister:** A number of companies in Scotland are involved in the manufacture of military equipment. Some of that military equipment is manufactured for our use here, and a lot of it is exported to other countries. Those companies make an important economic contribution to Scotland. In the conflict environment in Ukraine, they play a pivotal role in ensuring that people in Ukraine can properly defend themselves from Russian aggression. We welcome their participation in our economy, and they will be able to pursue their dialogue with the United Kingdom Government, which has responsibility for defence procurement.

As I said in my response to Russell Findlay, I have a long-standing view that we should not possess nuclear weapons, and nothing in the current environment persuades me to change that view.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** The US Administration seems determined to appease the Kremlin's butcher of Bucha and seek a Carthaginian peace that makes the treaty of Versailles look sensible. However, critical to peace is a guarantee of the security, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine.

In terms of European solidarity, what can the Scottish Government and individuals do to show our continued support for a just peace for the people of Ukraine at this exceptionally difficult time?

**The First Minister:** I think that the importance of a guarantee of security is absolutely fundamental in this discussion. Without a guarantee of security, the suffering of the people of Ukraine in the course of the past three years will have been for nothing, should they be exposed to further Russian aggression. Therefore, the point that Mr Gibson puts to me is vital.

I have set out the Government's position today in order to contribute to the discussion that is under way across a range of European and western countries on how, collectively and collaboratively, we can assure the security of Ukraine. If we do not secure the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, we will be acting in a manner that will undermine the safety and security

of western democracy, and we must not take that step.

Therefore, my point to Mr Gibson is about the importance of us contributing to that European dialogue and working with the United States to deliver the security that Ukraine requires. If we do not do that, we will, I fear, see more of the aggression that we have seen from Russia in the future.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** The consul of Ukraine in Scotland, who is in the gallery, told Parliament just a few days ago that Ukraine needs three powers: weapons, economic sanctions and diplomacy. I welcome the fact that, over the past few days, the Prime Minister has taken action on all three by pledging more weapons for Ukraine, funded by sanctions on Russian assets, and by providing steadfast diplomatic support.

What will the Scottish Government do to support the Prime Minister and the UK Government to provide the things that Ukraine says that it needs? The First Minister rightly talks about the need for a "united front", but does he agree that that applies not only to our actions but to our words? Will he ensure that nothing will be said by members of his Government that undermines the efforts of the Prime Minister to support Ukraine and find a lasting peace?

**The First Minister:** I do not think that I could have been clearer about the Scottish Government's support for the Prime Minister's efforts. That is expressed openly and genuinely to Parliament, and I wish the Prime Minister well in what he is trying to achieve. I do not underestimate the scale of the challenge that he faces, but I wish him well in that effort. We will take whatever steps we can to support him in that dialogue, to ensure that there is cohesion and resolution, and to ensure that the security guarantees that I mentioned to Kenneth Gibson can be delivered for the people of Ukraine and that their sovereignty can be protected.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** Last week, the consul of Ukraine in Scotland told the Parliament's Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee that Ukraine requires

"not only peace but a just peace."—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, 27 February 2025; c 5.*]

Does the First Minister agree with that? What would his message be on that matter?

**The First Minister:** The people of Ukraine have suffered enormously, and it is vital that the peace settlement that is achieved is one that protects the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Those are the requirements of a just peace, and they should comprise the approach

that is taken to confront Russia and to ensure that the legitimate aspirations of the people of Ukraine are fulfilled as a consequence of that support from the west.

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** I associate myself with the First Minister's remarks and acknowledge the work of the Prime Minister. It is important that he knows that he is acting on behalf of us all.

President Zelenskyy, if not quite like Churchill standing alone, is certainly standing on the front line in this contest. It is the blood, toil, tears and sweat of the Ukrainian people that are defending democracy in the west. Would the First Minister support a suggestion that an invitation from him and the Presiding Officer of the Parliament be extended to President Zelenskyy to address this Parliament, at a time of his choosing and at his convenience? There is a precedent for that—we have done it before. We could invite President Zelenskyy to address this Parliament and that could be in conjunction with the Parliament convening a national day of solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

**The First Minister:** I readily associate myself with Jackson Carlaw's suggestion. Invitations to Parliament are, of course, a matter for the Presiding Officer and the parliamentary authorities but, for my part in the Government, we would happily support such an endeavour.

Mr Carlaw raises an important opportunity for us as a country to come together to express our solidarity with the people of Ukraine. I would be happy to take part in any discussions on the important suggestion that he has made.

If I may, I will also say how welcome it is that Mr Carlaw makes clear his support, from his political position, for the work that the Prime Minister is undertaking to try to resolve the extremely serious situation that we currently face.

**Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** I welcome the First Minister's strong support for the principle of Ukrainian territorial integrity, its independence and the principle of self-determination.

The First Minister has acknowledged that personnel and other resources from Scotland may be deployed in any coalition of the willing as part of democratic Europe's response to Russian aggression. Does he agree that the decades-long depletion of armed forces personnel and equipment in the UK armed forces means that we require rearmament, whether with European Union partners or non-EU partners? Does he agree that that should contribute to more effective recruitment of armed forces personnel, driven by improved pay, greatly improved equipment in relation to individual conventional weapons and

cyber-resources, and the provision of relevant training opportunities, rather than squandering any resources on the immoral, utterly ineffective and increasingly irrelevant nuclear arsenal?

**The First Minister:** Mr Brown speaks with the authority of having been a member of the armed forces who served in active combat in the Falklands war in 1982. As I do on many issues, I have the greatest respect for the contribution that Keith Brown has made to public life and public service in our country through service in the armed forces, which I have never undertaken.

He acknowledges and knows the seriousness and significance of deploying armed forces in roles of danger. The approach that the Prime Minister is suggesting is that they should be in a position to protect and assure Ukraine's security, but that does not come without its dangers, given Russia's behaviour, which we all know to have been malevolent.

The issues that Mr Brown raised about the choices that have to be made about the deployment of armed personnel are very significant. That is why I believe that those issues should be considered and discussed openly in the House of Commons in order to enable a democratic decision to be made and, fundamentally, to enable us to act in solidarity with the Ukrainian people in protecting their independence.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** We must be steadfast in our support for Ukraine at this uncertain time, and I echo the need for international solidarity to defeat Russian aggression. Can the First Minister provide an update regarding the financial support that the Scottish Government has made available to support the humanitarian response to the conflict in Ukraine?

**The First Minister:** The Scottish Government has provided in excess of £5 million in relation to humanitarian assistance in Ukraine, which has provided essential supplies in relation to health, water, sanitation and shelter. Additional support has been provided for Ukrainian citizens who have been coming to Scotland and making this country their home.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** Our hearts go out to the people of Ukraine for what they have endured, and their hopes for peace and security for their nation and their right to sovereignty.

Does the First Minister agree that we live in complicated and dangerous times, given the rise of the right in Europe and the unpredictability of the US Administration, and that we must therefore strive for peace and stability in Europe and influence, where we can, all nations that are at war? That includes peace and security in the

middle east, where Europe could play a leading role for peace.

**The First Minister:** Pauline McNeill knows that I come at my politics from the perspective of believing in the necessity of European co-operation and active participation in European decision making and governance. I very much welcome the summit that the Prime Minister hosted at the weekend, which, fundamentally, involved European leaders. That is an indication of really good intention on these questions.

Pauline McNeill is absolutely right. I am certain that more could be undertaken at a European level to support peacemaking in the middle east. We all watch with horror the events that continue to take place in Gaza as we speak. The level of conflict in the world is intolerable, and we must use every available device at our disposal to work to bring communities together and to avoid conflict in the way that we are experiencing it today.

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** We all want to see a just peace, and in order to achieve that it is in Scotland's interests that we support Ukraine and its people's right to freedom, democracy and independence. History shows us that appeasing aggressors expands conflicts and prolongs wars. Does the First Minister share my view that no one who believes in democracy can afford to appease Putin and Russia's aggression?

**The First Minister:** I agree with that point. The threat to our democracy and to the values that have underpinned our society is real if we are not able to address and defeat Russia's aggression. That is the very real issue that we face as a society today, and it is so important and fundamental to the choices that we face.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** This is a wholly reserved matter, but the First Minister is right to express our solidarity and united support for Ukraine and its people, including those who now live among us in Scotland.

One of the measures that must now be taken is that Britain must re-arm, as Keith Brown said. That will mean increases in defence expenditure, which are to be welcomed. The lesson of history is that securing the peace is best done through strength, and Scotland is critical in that regard, because it is the location of many important defence contractors.

Does the First Minister agree with what I have said? If he does, will he take this opportunity to disavow the hostility of many SNP MSPs and MPs towards the defence sector? In fact, some ministers will not even meet defence contractors. Will he take this opportunity to give his whole-hearted support to those important businesses and their employees?

**The First Minister:** Stephen Kerr is correct that matters relating to international relations are wholly reserved, but I contend that they have an impact on our way of life. If the Parliament does not confront those issues, I do not think that we will address properly the challenges that all our communities face as a consequence of the situation in which we find ourselves.

We need to have effective defence forces available to us. Part of my argument is that we have a vast coastline and a vast airspace around Scotland, which are critical to the security of western Europe and our country, and our ability to defend that would be strengthened by greater emphasis on conventional weaponry, rather than the investment that has been made in nuclear defences. That is my reflection on defence priorities.

In relation to the defence sector, a strong number of companies in Scotland are involved in defence-related activities. Those companies make a significant contribution to Scotland's economy, and I welcome the work that they undertake. It is important that we recognise that, given the difficulties that we face at present.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Nearly 48,000 Ukrainians have found refuge in Scotland over the past three years, and about 800 of them are housed in Dumfries and Galloway. Their transition to life here has been hard, but it has been made easier by the huge amount of work that has been carried out by local agencies and volunteers, including my constituent Peter Kormylo, who has worked tirelessly to help Ukrainian refugees to navigate our national quirks. Does the First Minister agree that, as well as official support from local government and national Government, support from Peter and many thousands of people like him across Scotland should be valued? That support has been invaluable and is a shining example of humanity across our borders.

**The First Minister:** Right around the country, various local groups are doing such work. Indeed, one day last week, I met in the Parliament members of a group from South Ayrshire who have been providing welcoming support to individuals. Peter Kormylo, to whom Emma Harper referred, and the group from South Ayrshire have made that contribution, as have people from across the country, as I have seen in my community in Highland Perthshire, Aberfeldy and Errol, where work has been undertaken to support families and dispatch assistance to Ukraine. Those people have all made a huge contribution, which is deeply valued by the Scottish Government.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** The First Minister rightly recognised the contribution that



Scottish industry has made to the defence of Ukraine. To further bolster that effort, will he consider reconvening the aerospace, defence, marine and security industry leadership group, which has been dormant for some years, and appointing a ministerial co-chair?

**The First Minister:** Work has been undertaken to reform the industry leadership groups. I think that there is engagement with the defence sector, but I had better check that point for Mr Sweeney. I know that there is ministerial interaction on all these questions.

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** The First Minister will be aware that a large number of Ukrainian families fleeing the war have been resettled in North Lanarkshire, with many being housed in refurbished tower blocks in Coatbridge in my constituency. As they are my constituents, my thoughts are very much with them at this unsettling time, and I have written to them this week to remind them that they can contact me in my office at any time.

Can the First Minister outline what on-going support is in place to ensure that those families, and the thousands like them across the country, continue to be supported in our communities and feel the strength of our unwavering solidarity at this most difficult time?

**The First Minister:** The support for Ukrainian families in Scotland will come from a combination of the community support that Mr MacGregor's constituency will have offered, the support that Emma Harper has just mentioned in her question and the work that is being undertaken by the Scottish Government and our partners. That support has always been important, but it is ever more important, given the uncertainties that the people of Ukraine feel at the moment.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind):** The First Minister indicates that he thinks that we probably should be increasing defence spending, and I certainly agree with that, but would he agree that that money should not come from the international aid budget?

**The First Minister:** What I said at the weekend on this question is that we have to have an honest and open discussion about the public expenditure priorities of the United Kingdom. I tried to have that discussion during the general election campaign, when I pointed out that our public services were under enormous fiscal pressure and that we had to improve the finance that is available for our public services. The issues that we are now confronting affect our defence and security and they merit a response in that respect. We have to have an honest discussion about our priorities. I do not view the question as an either/or—it is not

the case that either we can afford defence expenditure or we can afford public services.

Equally, I take the view that John Mason is marshalling today that reductions in overseas aid expenditure can be short-sighted, because we have to change the nature of inequality and address the inequalities in our world, and overseas aid is fundamental to doing that. That has been a shared priority of many Governments for many years, and it is important that we address such priorities. However, we can do so only with an honest discussion about public finances and the choices that are available in relation to taxation. We need to have that discussion.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the First Minister's statement on international solidarity to support Ukraine. There will be a brief pause before we move on to the next item of business.

## Scotland's Renewable Future

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16657, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scotland's renewable future. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:09

**The Acting Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy (Gillian Martin):** I am pleased to be opening today's debate on rejection of new nuclear power plants in Scotland and the Scottish Government's commitment to renewable energy. I am grateful for the opportunity to set out to the Parliament the Scottish Government's continued opposition to new nuclear, while illustrating the exceptional opportunity that clean renewable energy presents for Scotland's economy and energy security.

At the outset, I take the opportunity to reiterate the Scottish Government's position that we do not support the building of any new nuclear power stations in Scotland. Instead, our focus must be on accelerating the deployment of renewables technologies. To put it simply, renewables are safer, cheaper, faster to deploy and better for jobs than nuclear. Nuclear generation has gone on in Scotland for some time, but for the future we have better sustainable energy options due to advances in renewables technology.

The people who have staffed nuclear fission stations in Scotland—and those who continue to do so at Torness—have played a vital role in keeping Scotland's lights on, and I thank them for that. The contribution of nuclear to electricity generation in Scotland is decreasing, however, and will continue to do so.

Generation of electricity from nuclear fission presents a number of challenges—not the least of which is that nuclear generation creates a legacy of radioactive waste that will have to be managed for thousands of years, and requires complex and robust management to ensure the protection of people and the environment. Cleaning up Scotland's existing nuclear sites safely and securely is extremely expensive and will take many decades.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** Is it also now the case that the SNP Scottish Government would not consider any new fission technologies?

**Gillian Martin:** Our position is clear. Given the current technologies, that is our position. We cannot say what will happen in the future and we cannot say what would happen with regard to the

waste that is associated with nuclear power generation. It is that particular issue, as well as the cost of it, that causes our opposition. I want to make it clear to Martin Whitfield that we are looking at the matter in the context of the technologies that exist just now.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** Although she supports development of our renewable resources, does the cabinet secretary agree that, in order to have a functioning electricity system, every country needs a variety of sources of generation? Indeed, it was Sir Winston Churchill who said that, when it comes to electricity supply, the solution is "variety and variety alone".

**Gillian Martin:** I cannot disagree with any of that. In particular, I feel that hydro power has been a very overlooked generator in the past. Neighbouring countries—in particular, Norway—have placed a great deal of importance on hydro power and are very energy secure in a way that other countries are not. However, that does not mean that there should be wholesale acceptance of all the technologies that are out there. I am setting out the Scottish Government's vision in relation to new nuclear.

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Gillian Martin:** I will, and will then continue with my speech.

**Kevin Stewart:** I would like to see much more emphasis on hydrogen power generation, as the cabinet secretary well knows. Scotland has a great boon when it comes to hydrogen power from renewables. Does she see hydrogen as being a major way forward in terms of base-load?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you the time back for the intervention, cabinet secretary.

**Gillian Martin:** I think that hydrogen is going to have many uses—not least in decarbonisation of transport and heavy goods vehicles, and in industrial decarbonisation. Kevin Stewart is right to point to it. It can potentially even be an energy source for domestic use. He will be familiar with the H100 Fife programme, which the First Minister officially opened and which is trialling use of hydrogen in domestic settings.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** Will the cabinet secretary give way on that point?

**Gillian Martin:** This will be the last intervention that I take.

**Patrick Harvie:** Has the minister seen the United Kingdom Climate Change Committee's report "The Seventh Carbon Budget", which was published a week or 10 days ago? It concludes very clearly that, although hydrogen will have

many other uses in the energy system, it will have no role in domestic heating.

**Gillian Martin:** I have seen the report, but I have heard from quite a few different sources on the matter—not least, from Southern Gas Networks, or SGN, which believes that a combination that includes hydrogen in the gas grid could be used to decarbonise the existing gas infrastructure. I do not think that we should rule anything out. We do not know what will happen in the future, with regard to technologies.

I will continue with my speech, if that is okay. I mentioned the creation of a dangerous and long-lasting radioactive waste legacy, but we cannot discuss nuclear power without also referring to its capacity to cause catastrophic damage through accidents and malfunctions. We have been lucky that that has not happened in Scotland, but nuclear has a tainted safety history, with terrible incidents having occurred at Chernobyl and, more recently, at Fukushima in Japan. In developing new clean energy systems for the future, we have a moral imperative to ensure that they do not have the ability to threaten the existence of any population or the environment that we depend on.

As long as there are serious environmental concerns, the Scottish Government is wholly unconvinced by the economic argument for the development of new nuclear. The construction of new nuclear power stations is hugely expensive and would inevitably lead to a further increase in consumer energy bills. For example, when Hinkley Point C was given the green light by the UK Government, it was due to be completed by 2025 at a cost of £18 billion; however, last month, EDF Energy estimated that the project might not be completed until 2031, at a cost of up to £46 billion—more than two and a half times the original cost estimate.

Neither is the news better for electricity consumers: even the UK Government's own estimates show that the cost for new nuclear power is £109 per megawatt hour, compared with £38 and £44 per megawatt hour for onshore wind and offshore wind respectively. New nuclear generation will increase bills.

As we transition to a clean energy system, we must ensure that, as well as being clean, energy should enhance economic growth and be secure and affordable. That is why we have been clear that the UK Government's intended investment in nuclear energy—

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Gillian Martin:** I have taken too many interventions as it is.

Scotland already has an enviable track record in renewable generation, including onshore and offshore wind, solar and tidal. I echo what the First Minister said in his speech on climate action at Glasgow Botanic Gardens, last month:

“Scotland's greatest contribution to the global climate challenge is our renewable energy potential, our technical expertise and our capacity for innovation.”

Scotland proudly leads the way across the UK in onshore wind deployment. As of 24 September, we had approximately 10.2GW of operational onshore wind capacity in Scotland, and we are working hard to ensure that new developments maximise value for communities through the onshore wind sector deal, which includes commitments for actions by both the Government and industry that will secure benefits for Scotland's economy, communities and natural environment.

To complement our work on deployment of onshore wind, we are pressing forward with our ambitious offshore wind targets, which will ensure that Scotland is fuel secure well into the future, and will provide good-quality jobs in energy for the long term. We have an estimated pipeline of more than 40GW of Scottish offshore wind capacity, on top of the 3GW that are already operational. Those projects are crucial to supporting our commitment to a just transition and will continue to affirm Scotland's position as a world leader in the energy sector.

Although the deployment of renewable generation is important, its intermittent nature means that development of storage capacity is essential for ensuring the security and flexibility of our energy system. Scotland has a significant pipeline of pumped storage hydro projects, equating to 6.9GW of storage capacity, which offers a significant investment potential that will bring huge economic benefits to Scotland. In my answer to Fergus Ewing, I mentioned what other countries have done in that regard.

The energy transition is an era-defining economic opportunity for Scotland, with the potential to provide tens of thousands of good-quality sustainable green jobs across the country. We are leading the UK in delivering a green jobs revolution and unlocking the tremendous potential that is held by that transition and the wider net zero journey.

In addition, the manufacturing supply chain and support activities that are associated with renewables are set to give a future to old industrial sites, including the high-voltage direct current cable manufacturing plant that is planned for Hunterston; Ardersier, which is thriving under new management; and the Sumitomo Electric investment in Nigg. The £800 million Coalburn battery storage project in South Lanarkshire

further highlights the scale of the opportunity to give disused industrial sites a new lease of life.

We are striving towards a clean energy system and growing our national economy. I feel strongly that we must do so in a way that supports the communities that host the infrastructure. Despite much of that being reserved to the UK Government, we are taking action to make sure that communities gain tangible benefits from Scotland's clean power revolution.

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

**Gillian Martin:** I have only about a minute left, so I will finish my points.

In the past 12 months, benefits worth more than £30 million have been offered to Scottish communities. However, our principles of good practice must be improved, and the amount of money that comes to communities must be ramped up. As I said, the powers to mandate community benefits and shared ownership are reserved. However, we are taking practical action to maximise those opportunities in Scotland, including through our on-going consultation on improving the good practice principles for onshore and offshore renewable energy developments, in order to ensure that our national guidance is updated and fit for the future. I encourage communities, businesses and everyone with an interest in our energy system to take part and ensure that our guidance supports sustainable and meaningful outcomes.

We are also working hard to improve Scottish Government guidance on pre-application processes in order to ensure that communities are heard by developers ahead of planning applications being submitted. A review of that guidance will be published in the coming weeks.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the minister give way?

**Gillian Martin:** I am coming to a close.

In bringing my speech to a close, I want to reflect on the decision that is before us, which is whether to spend huge sums of money on nuclear, which will not reduce consumer bills and will leave us with an environmental hazard extending thousands of years into the future, or to continue to invest in renewables and Scotland's future.

There is a unique opportunity at stake. We have an opportunity to reach our climate goals, provide cost-competitive energy security and grow our economy through the deployment of renewables and associated infrastructure. I repeat: renewable energy is safer, cheaper and faster to deploy, and creates more jobs than nuclear generation.

Therefore, I ask Parliament to reject the creation of new nuclear power plants in Scotland and the risks that they bring, and to agree that Scotland's future is as a renewables powerhouse that benefits the people of Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament rejects the creation of new nuclear power plants in Scotland and the risk that they bring; believes that Scotland's future is as a renewables powerhouse; further believes that the expansion of renewables should have a positive impact on household energy bills; notes the challenges and dangers of producing and managing hazardous radioactive nuclear waste products, and the potentially catastrophic consequences of the failure of a nuclear power plant; recognises that the development and operation of renewable power generation is faster, cheaper and safer than that of nuclear power, and welcomes that renewables would deliver higher employment than nuclear power for the development and production of equivalent levels of generated power.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members who have not yet pressed their request-to-speak buttons but who intend to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

I call Douglas Lumsden to speak to and to move amendment S6M-16657.3.

15:21

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I have been in Parliament for four years now, and I feel that, today, I am speaking on the most important topic. Up and down the country, people have real concerns about what they see happening to their communities and their homes. Many of them contacted me over the weekend, asking me to speak up for them, because they are feeling ignored. I have promised to speak for June, Andy, Vince, Shona, Caroline, Aileen, Kate, Laura, Angela and all the others who have contacted me, and all the concerned residents I have met over the past six months—from Turriff, New Deer and Leylodge to Angus and Save Our Mearns, and everywhere in between.

We are talking today about energy production and the importance of renewable energy while the reality is happening in our communities and industries throughout the north-east. If the devolved Scottish Government really cared about our energy production, the cabinet secretary would be meeting the communities I have met. She would have spoken to the people I have spoken to. She would have taken the time to go outside, on to her own doorstep, and listen to the voices outside the Parliament that are telling the Scottish National Party to think again.

**The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan):** Not for the first time, I point out to the member that the ministerial code does not

allow ministers to meet community groups that are engaged in live planning applications.

**Douglas Lumsden:** They can meet with SSE but they cannot meet with the people they are meant to represent. If the minister reads the ministerial code, he will see that that is wrong.

When I saw that there was to be another debate on renewable energy, I, like many others, assumed that we would once again be talking about a just transition to renewables or the future of our oil and gas sector—or that there would maybe even be word of the much-delayed energy strategy. I was therefore quite surprised when I saw the focus on nuclear. So, that is this week's anti-science from this out-of-ideas SNP Government. What should be the most important discussion of our time—how we make sure that we have the energy resources that we need during international destabilisation—instead turns into a nonsense debate that is designed to score political points for this out-of-touch, out-of-ideas SNP Government.

We are living in a time of global uncertainty when most of our energy requirements are still met from oil and gas. At a time when we should be looking at how we can become more energy self-sufficient in the short term and more green in the medium-to-long term, this Government would rather stoke political grievance. We should be looking at how we can fulfil our energy needs by expanding our domestic oil and gas supplies in the short term. We are overreliant on imported oil and gas now, and the SNP wants to increase that by shutting off the taps of the North Sea. Its presumption against new oil and gas is hurting the industry, the north-east and the towns and communities that rely on the sector.

We also know that energy based on solar and wind power is not reliable all year round. We must ensure that we have the required base-load when we need it, which is why so many countries are considering small, modular nuclear reactors. Scotland could be leading the way and at the forefront of that technology, but, once again, this Government insists on holding us back, on false science and on scaremongering. This devolved Government should be harnessing the well-paid and highly skilled workers at Torness and Hunterston, but instead it wants to turn its back on them with its scaremongering and pathetic motion today.

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Jamie Hepburn):** Will the member accept an intervention?

**Douglas Lumsden:** I will come back to the minister if I have time.

The Government's motion says that nuclear power is more expensive, but the contract for

difference for Hinckley Point is £92 per megawatt hour, whereas the CFD for the Green Volt floating wind project, which the SNP was so keen to fast track, was £139 per megawatt hour. It is no wonder that Stephen Flynn received £30,000 towards his campaign from one of the owners.

The SNP is against new oil and gas, against nuclear and against speaking to communities and industry. Its only plan is to put all its eggs in one basket; have as much wind energy as possible, miles away from where the demand is; cover our countryside with monster pylons, substations and batteries; and ignore the concerns of our residents.

I have met many communities throughout the north-east that are rightly concerned about the impact of central belt-led SNP policies. They are dealing with the reality of hundreds of kilometres of monster pylons throughout their communities and countryside, and I know that colleagues in the Borders have had similar meetings.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member give way?

**Douglas Lumsden:** No.

They are concerned about prime agricultural land being taken away and covered in concrete for substations or to create bases for monster pylons. They are concerned about operating farm machinery under power lines and about the impact of noise. They have health concerns and concerns about the impact on animals and on the value of their properties, and they are worried about rural depopulation, loss of biodiversity and the fact that the chair of SSE is a member of the panel on the ministerial code. They are concerned about the number of battery storage systems in the planning system, worried about the risks and angry that no one seems to be listening to their concerns.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Douglas Lumsden:** Maybe the member should listen to this.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Douglas Lumsden:** They want to know why undergrounding and offshoring seems to be discounted by both Governments and why the Scottish Government is content to use planning powers to block new nuclear but will not use the same powers to stop the desecration of our countryside.

I will give way to Rachael Hamilton. *[Interruption.]* SNP members can give way to some of their own colleagues.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Earlier today, it was announced that an application for a wind farm of

52 turbines in the Scottish Borders will go to a public inquiry before Scottish ministers decide its fate. Does Douglas Lumsden share my concern that communities are not put at the heart of decision making? Is it not the case that this Scottish Government will overturn community opposition because of its blind pursuit of net zero?

**Douglas Lumsden:** I hope that the Government does not overturn it, because it needs to listen to communities. There are communities here today, so maybe it can listen to them later.

There are all those questions, but no one—from this Government is prepared to meet community members, look them in the eye and hear their concerns. As I said, some of them are here today, so the Government still has the opportunity. We know that the cabinet secretary has not met them or heard their concerns but that she has, meanwhile, met the companies that want to build those monster pylons. When he was asked about that by Tess White last year, the First Minister was sure that ministers would meet communities, but no minister has had the bottle to do that. It is shameful.

Not only does this Government want to erect pylons in our communities, but it wants to remove residents' right to object via the planning system, watering down the voices of our residents and removing the right to a public inquiry.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Mr Lumsden give way?

**Douglas Lumsden:** Not yet.

This is one of the most important issues that we can and should address in this chamber, and I am genuinely pleased that the Government has brought this business to Parliament today. We need more discussion about our energy future and the price that many of our communities are having to pay. Nuclear power should have a huge part to play in our energy future and would negate much of the need to have monster pylons ruining our countryside, because we could produce energy closer to where it is required. However, this anti-science devolved Government wants to turn its back on all of that.

I will give way briefly to Kevin Stewart.

**Kevin Stewart:** Can Mr Lumsden explain how the electricity would flow from the proposed nuclear power stations that he wants to see to people's homes across the country? Does he recognise that pylons play a part in the movement of electricity from nuclear power stations as well as from elsewhere?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before Mr Lumsden resumes, I say to members that I realise that this debate is going to excite a degree of emotion and passion—that is entirely predictable and, indeed, not undesirable—but I ask members

to listen to the member who has the floor instead of shouting from a sedentary position.

Douglas Lumsden, please continue. I can give you the time back.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

What Kevin Stewart does not understand is that, if we build nuclear power stations close to where the demand is, we negate the need for pylons. *[Interruption.]* Obviously, he has not got a clue about the electricity market.

At a time of international uncertainty, we should be securing our energy supplies for the future with a credible mix of sources. This Government is intent on closing doors to viable options, based on far left-wing ideologies that hold little credible science. We should be producing our own oil and gas in the short term and investing in new technologies such as small nuclear reactors. We should be building our renewables sector, but we should also be listening to and working with communities to mitigate and properly compensate. Instead, this Government is intent on using the debate to score cheap political points rather than actually deal with—*[Interruption.]*

Are SNP members laughing at those communities? They are here to see them. *[Interruption.]* Does the minister think that that is funny?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Lumsden, please resume your seat.

I remind those in the public gallery that this is a meeting in public, not a public meeting. You should not be participating in the debate.

Mr Lumsden, please start to bring your remarks to a close.

**Douglas Lumsden:** It is shameful that the minister is laughing at the people who have come down here to protest today. *[Interruption.]* Only the Scottish Conservatives are standing up for the oil and gas sector. Only the Scottish Conservatives believe that we need an energy mix and are listening to the many voices from the real world, not this cloud-cuckoo-land of anti-science nonsense.

I move amendment S6M-16657.3, to leave out from "rejects" to end and insert:

"recognises the importance of renewable energy in Scotland's future, but believes that a balanced energy mix, including investment in new nuclear power, such as small modular reactors, is essential to ensuring a secure, clean and affordable energy source by reducing the country's reliance on foreign energy and creating a reliable energy supply for the UK; acknowledges that nuclear power is a proven, low-carbon energy source that operates independently of weather conditions, complementing the variability of renewables and reducing reliance on imported

fossil fuels; notes that, while renewables will play a central role in Scotland's energy transition, they alone cannot provide the constant, stable supply required to meet demand; acknowledges that Scotland's oil and gas sector has been a cornerstone of the UK's energy security and economy for decades and will continue to play a crucial role in providing reliable energy, supporting skilled jobs and driving investment in clean energy innovation; recognises the vital contribution of energy companies in leading the transition to a cleaner future through investments in emerging technologies that will underpin net zero goals while maintaining energy resilience; notes that, whilst new renewable and electrical infrastructure is needed, the right of communities to object must be respected, with wind turbines, battery energy storage systems, pylons and other infrastructure only being built where it has the express consent of residents; calls for an energy strategy that embraces renewables, nuclear and the managed use of domestic oil and gas to ensure affordable, stable and low-carbon energy for Scotland's households and businesses, and welcomes the economic and employment opportunities that a broad-based energy mix will bring to Scotland."

15:31

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** When I first saw that the SNP Government was holding a debate on renewable energy, I was really pleased. I thought that it would be a great opportunity to debate what we need to do to support the sector in respect of supply chains, training and manufacturing and to consider the strategic infrastructure that we need, including investment in our ports and resilient grid infrastructure. I was also thinking about the long-term delays in planning and what needs to happen to ensure that we have effective systems for key Government agencies so that they have the resource to provide input into major planning decisions effectively and in a timely fashion.

**Gillian Martin:** I did not have enough time in my speech to mention everything. We have doubled the number of people in the Government's consent screenings team so that we have consents going through within 52 weeks, which has been welcomed by the sector.

**Sarah Boyack:** Yes, but people are worried about the fact that the Berwick Bank project, for example, has now been on the ministerial desk for more than two years. We have a number of projects that are way over that timescale, so that issue is not fixed. It is clearly an issue in relation to offshore projects, so I would also be keen to hear when the consultation on the sectoral marine plan will be published, as that is long delayed.

It would also be useful to discuss how we can maximise the use of the electricity that is produced by renewables, so that we do not have to pay to turn off turbines and waste the energy, which has long been an issue. For example, the cabinet secretary mentioned hydro. We have had that for more than 80 years. Now we have pumped hydro storage, which is inspiring; it gives us a more

joined-up system. The acting cabinet secretary referenced the UK Climate Change Committee's recent recommendations on doing more to support the installation of heat pumps. The Scottish Government could take the lead on that and do more to support our constituents who want to install solar, then battery and/or heat pumps, to decarbonise their homes—but no, that is not happening.

Then there are the opportunities around using the next generation of wind turbines and floating wind to supply community heat networks. Our Nordic neighbours have used heat networks for decades to deliver affordable, low-carbon heat. That is especially relevant given that our councils all submitted their local heat and energy efficiency strategies more than a year ago.

It would also be good to debate the community benefits that were referenced just a few minutes ago. We have seen that in relation to renewables, but there is much more that we can do to empower communities to develop more projects that will generate long-term jobs and investment locally, whether that is through the community or through co-operatively or municipally owned heat and power. However, we need more effective leadership.

**Fergus Ewing:** With regard to communities benefiting, does Sarah Boyack agree that the ideal would be communities not getting a cheque for £5,000 per megawatt per annum, but having a share of—a stake in—the ownership, and that the Governments in Scotland and the UK should be working together to deliver that?

**Sarah Boyack:** That is exactly the principle behind the establishment of Great British Energy and the local power plan, working with the Scottish Government and—crucially—with our local councils, too, because they are in touch with communities on the ground. I agree that having a share, or ownership, is crucial, but it is not an option for a lot of communities.

Finally, I even wondered whether, today, we would see the publication of the Scottish Government's long-awaited energy and just transition plan, but no. Apart from name checking renewables, the SNP motion is negative—it ignores the contribution that is currently made by the nuclear sector and is in denial about the opportunities that that could deliver. It is a retrograde motion.

I do not pretend that the world has not had nuclear safety issues historically, but safety standards are now internationally agreed and based on experience, and are at the heart of the design of new small modular reactors. It is vital that standards are met, with monitoring and well-trained management and staff, and that safety is

fundamental to the operation of nuclear power stations.

Should historical safety concerns mean that we rule out the contribution that nuclear power can make?

**Alasdair Allan:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sarah Boyack:** I would be delighted to take an intervention on that point.

**Alasdair Allan:** The member mentions safety. I merely ask whether she would be content to have a nuclear waste repository in her constituency.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you the time back, Ms Boyack.

**Sarah Boyack:** Well actually, just next door to my constituency we have Torness nuclear power station, which has been operating for decades. The key issue is safe waste. In fact, the issue that people usually raise with me is waste in our waters and on our beaches, so we need to tackle waste across our society.

To go back to my point, Labour's amendment is clear that we need to maximise the contribution of low-carbon energy technology, and in order to transition successfully to low and zero carbon energy sources, we need to deliver energy security. We need a sustainable generation baseline and, in our view, nuclear has to be part of the future energy mix. It is highly efficient—

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

**Sarah Boyack:** If it is brief.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Douglas Lumsden, briefly.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Thank you—I will be brief.

On energy security, do you not feel that it is better that we actually produce our own gas, rather than rely on imports?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Through the chair, always.

**Sarah Boyack:** The thing is that we are going to have our oil and gas for decades to come, and we need a joined-up approach. For example, there is floating wind energy where offshore oil and gas is being produced, but we have to take responsibility with regard to the climate emergency, which is hitting our constituents now. When I talk to people up in the north-east and look across the country at who can get insurance for their homes and buildings, it is clear that there are issues that we need to deal with. It has to be a fair transition, which is why nuclear has to be part of the process. It is a highly efficient, zero-emissions source of energy that generates more than 20 per cent of

the electricity that we currently consume and provides high-skilled, well-paid reliable jobs that generate income in those communities with a power plant.

There are absolutely lessons to be learned. I very much agree on the failures that we have seen down south over the past decade from the Tory Government with regard to nuclear power stations and rising costs, but we need to learn from those experiences and not rule out the tech on principle. If we ruled out projects that did not deliver on time, the Scottish Government would have some major challenges.

Moreover, the development of SMRs is a game changer—they are now a real option, and they are more economic and will deliver on-going reliable electricity as we go forward.

As the Labour amendment says, nuclear and renewables are not mutually exclusive—they are complementary parts of Scotland having a fossil fuel-free energy mix into the future. If we do not take up that challenge, we will miss out economically. Our European neighbours have 12 nuclear plants at planning stages; we have none. We have one nuclear power station left in Scotland, at Torness. Our workers on that site have kept the lights on and powered our country since the 1980s, and they deserve a future and a fair, just transition. In addition, we might think of the benefits for construction.

We need to decarbonise our homes and buildings and our industrial sector, but we should do so in a way that supports workers and ensures that they have jobs now and in the future. That is what we need to benefit our local communities, but it is clear today that that is not what the SNP is planning for. The SNP wants an argument, but—while that approach was very successful for the first 20 minutes of this debate—we need to work together, because these are long-term decisions.

We welcome the extension of Torness's lifespan to 2028, which will keep those skilled, well-paid and unionised jobs in our local communities.

Sorry, Deputy Presiding Officer—I see that the light is flashing. I was told that I had nine minutes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You were told that you had seven minutes.

**Sarah Boyack:** Okay—I apologise.

The power that the site has provided to Scotland has meant that we avoided 146 million tonnes of carbon dioxide-equivalent emissions. Should we not be delivering a low-carbon future?

Ed Miliband clearly wants to work with the Scottish Government to deliver our clean power mission, and Anas Sarwar said today that we should welcome the support from the UK



Government for the next generation of nuclear energy technology so that Scotland does not miss out.

Let us have a joined-up approach. Let the Scottish Government deliver the leadership that our renewables industry urgently needs, and let us look at a sustainable baseline of power. We urgently need a change of direction—let us get on with it.

I move amendment S6M-16657.2, to leave out from “rejects” to end and insert:

“recognises the huge potential, and progress made, in Scotland to develop renewable energy generation capacity; considers that Scotland has a future as a renewables powerhouse and that this will help with the long-term ambitions to decarbonise Scotland’s energy usage; acknowledges that, to successfully transition to low- and zero-carbon energy sources and deliver energy security, it will require a sustainable generation baseline; considers that nuclear energy is therefore an essential part of the future energy mix, as a highly efficient, zero-emissions source of energy that generates over 20% of the electricity consumed in Scotland; notes that Torness nuclear power station directly supports hundreds of jobs, as well as many more in the wider economy in the region, and welcomes the decision to extend its lifespan; welcomes the support from the UK Government for the next generation of nuclear energy technology and the development of small modular reactors; regrets that Scotland will miss out on these investment and job opportunities due to the Scottish Government’s opposition to new nuclear energy projects, and calls on it to end its outdated ideological opposition to small modular reactors.”

15:40

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** There is a great deal to talk about, so I hope that the task of dismissing the argument for new nuclear will be the quick part of this speech.

The minister already mentioned costs. The massive up-front capital costs that have to be repaid over the operational lifetime mean that new nuclear will deliver energy at £109 per megawatt hour, compared with less than half of that—£44 for offshore wind, £41 for large-scale solar and just £38 for onshore wind.

On timescales, we know that emission cuts are needed quickly and that nuclear is slow to deliver. That goes for big projects such as Hinkley C, which was announced in 2010 and is unlikely to operate before the 2030s after a vast cost overrun. It is also true for the idea of small modular reactors, with which some nuclear lobbyists have a current love affair. Although designs and prototypes have been in development for decades, they are still not delivering on a commercial scale anywhere in the world.

If SMRs ever end up delivering on their long-promised advantages, those advantages will depend on deployment at scale, including through standardised design models and minimising on-

site construction. That is not great for the jobs argument that some of the advocates rely on either.

As for the argument about base-load, if the task before us was simply to rebuild like for like a low-carbon version of the 20th century energy system, the concept of base-load cannot be avoided. However, we are seeing the emergence of a new energy system that is based on diverse, decentralised renewable generation, demand reduction, large-scale deployment of new forms of energy storage and lots of interconnection for highly efficient, long-distance electricity trading between markets, and smart technology to smooth the variability of demand and supply.

**Sarah Boyack:** On the point about having a base-load, we absolutely need renewables, but you also have intermittent renewables, and much more electricity supply is needed. Is it not a win-win to do both?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please speak through the chair.

**Patrick Harvie:** All of the range of technologies that I have just described are the reason why we are moving away from the world where centralised base-load generation is required and towards a more diverse, decentralised energy system. In short, the clean, secure and energy-efficient energy system that we need simply does not rely on nuclear.

Let us look at where Scotland’s advantages lie. We have a strong track record on renewables. Successive Governments have set targets that many so-called experts dismissed; they said that renewables would never generate that much. However, those targets were successfully exceeded. In some years, we are now generating more in renewable electricity than the electricity that we consume.

We have skills in oil and gas that can transfer to many new industries, including areas such as green hydrogen, if both Governments are proactive, because we know that the oil and gas companies will not be.

Scotland also has many areas where we need to catch up on lost ground. We waste too much energy and we still construct our buildings as though energy is cheap to use. There have been improvements in energy efficiency standards in new builds, but that must go further. We have to start treating investment in the energy efficiency of existing buildings as a national strategic infrastructure priority.

We rely too much on private ownership and not enough on public and community ownership. There is a strong case for an ambitious target for the amount of wholly community-owned renewable

energy in Scotland and for priority access to land for community energy to make that target a reality. The Government must put in place support for community projects to access the capital that they need for repowering. Commercial repowering must also deliver community benefit, just as new-build commercial wind should.

That is in addition to the need to learn from the best of Denmark's experience, which has been building heat networks for 50 years and doing it for public benefit rather than for private profit, which protects its energy consumers. With communities owning their own heat infrastructure and renewable generating capacity, that experience shows us that we do not need to replicate an energy system that extracts profit from people in fuel poverty.

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

**Patrick Harvie:** I do not have time, I am afraid.

We have an energy system that is still regulated as though it is for the needs of the 20th century. Renewable electricity is the cheapest power to generate and should be the cheapest to consume, but the way that the UK regulates the energy market artificially increases its price to consumers and acts as a barrier to people shifting away from fossil fuels for heat and transport.

We also have a gap between the political desire to be seen as climate leaders and the political courage to act. Despite our strong track record on renewables, there has been little to no progress on other sectors such as land, buildings and transport, and there is now a series of delays to the energy strategy and just transition plan. I have seen suggestions that the legal rulings on the unlawful approval of Rosebank and Jackdaw have in some way led to those delays. That can be the case only if the Government proposes to express positive support for those unlawfully approved developments.

The heat in buildings bill would relate to one of the most obvious areas in which we do not just need to cut emissions but to deploy systems that can use renewable electricity to displace fossil fuels at scale and in a way that will cut people's bills. That was accelerating in the first two years of the current parliamentary session, and the bill was on track to be introduced before the end of 2024. Now the bill is absent, with no explanation.

Renewables growth did not happen by magic. Scotland was successful because successive Governments gave clear and consistent signals to innovators, investors, the workforce and policy makers that Scotland was serious about renewables. That is the clarity that we need on the clean heat sector—for building owners, investors, installers and those who train them, and for the

businesses that are innovating in new systems. The benefits are there for the taking in jobs, reduced bills, emissions cuts and energy security, but only if the Scottish Government ends the delay, commits to a truly ambitious agenda and puts the bill before the Parliament now.

I move amendment S6M-16657.1, to insert at end:

“; believes, however, that for the benefits of renewable energy to be maximised, further action is needed; further believes that both governments should place a higher priority on public and community ownership of renewable energy infrastructure; recognises the need for the UK Government to make changes to energy regulation and pricing to incentivise renewable generation, storage and grid infrastructure, and to make electrification of heat and transport more financially attractive, and further recognises the urgent need for the Scottish Government to end the delays to the Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan and the planned Heat in Buildings Bill, which must be introduced to the Parliament as soon as possible.”

15:47

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I am grateful for the opportunity to speak for the Liberal Democrats in this debate. As we have heard several times today, Scotland has the potential to lead the world when it comes to the production of clean energy. The need to take advantage of that opportunity is underscored by what we discussed earlier, which is our energy security and the volatile global situation, as well as the volatile markets of recent years.

Regardless of our views on nuclear energy, I am sure that we can all agree that the importance of renewable energy to Scotland's decarbonisation journey should not be understated. Renewable energy is now the cheapest form of energy generation. It can be installed at scale and, crucially, it provides the energy independence that reduces our reliance on imported fuels and insulates us from volatile global markets and threats to our energy security.

As we all know, Scotland has the potential to be a renewables powerhouse. It has been said in the chamber many times that we have the wind, the waves, the technology and the ambition to achieve that. The challenge ahead is not just about how we generate renewable energy but also how we ensure that that energy is abundant, clean and affordable for all. The UK's renewable energy generation has increased significantly since 2010, and 70 per cent of the electricity that is generated in Scotland is from renewable technology. That is progress, and we should be glad of it.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Are the Liberal Democrats content that our countryside is being covered with pylons, substations and batteries?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I will come on to the grid in more depth. However, Douglas Lumsden is right to raise the impact of energy transmission on our communities. Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks could certainly do more to bring the hearts and minds of communities with it, rather than adopt the path of least resistance, as it seems to be doing at the moment. He will be aware of my party's support for several community-led campaigns, particularly in the far north.

Scotland's renewable energy generation has made great progress, but we need to go much further if we are to meet our net zero targets. The Climate Change Committee has been clear that the United Kingdom must accelerate the deployment of renewable and grid infrastructure in order to provide a decarbonised power system by 2035. At present, we are just not moving fast enough. We will see increasingly higher demand for electricity use as we change the way that we move around, switching to electrically powered transport, and, indeed, the way that we power our homes.

**Martin Whitfield:** Will the member give way on that point?

**Fergus Ewing:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Do I have a decent amount of time left, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give time back, Mr Cole-Hamilton.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I will take Martin Whitfield first, then Fergus Ewing.

**Martin Whitfield:** On the intermittency of renewable energy supply, the best pumped hydro storage can provide only 50 hours of storage. Given that we are talking about an increase in electricity demand, how does the member see the gap being filled?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I will come on to storage in a minute. We have a job to do not only on pumped hydro, but on battery storage.

**Fergus Ewing:** Mr Cole-Hamilton rightly argues that the process needs to be speeded up. However, to do that, the Scottish and UK Governments should have a standing committee that issues clear mandates to the plethora of public bodies, all of which are involved one way or another in the process. Without that, there is not really any chance that targets set by either Government can conceivably be met. Does the member agree?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Fergus Ewing's point is typically well made. He is right. There is a great deal of bureaucracy in this landscape. There is

unnecessary delay, particularly around the upgrade of the grid. Our efforts to transmit that abundant energy need to be a national work of endeavour, which cannot be held back by the things that he has described.

A major obstacle to the energy transition is Scotland's grid. It was designed for a system that was dominated by large, centralised power stations. The future of energy, as we all know, is local, distributed and flexible. The failure to invest in that grid is already holding back renewables, as Fergus Ewing alluded to.

In recent years, we have heard that wind farms are being paid hundreds of millions of pounds through constraint payments—constraint payments, Presiding Officer!—to switch off their turbines when the electricity that they are producing cannot be absorbed into the grid. That money is coming directly out of people's pockets, simply because our infrastructure cannot keep up. At a time when people's bills are soaring, that feels insane.

We need to do better. We need a modern, smart grid that can handle variable renewable generation, connect Scotland's energy production with the rest of the United Kingdom and Europe and integrate energy storage solutions. Without that, we will not be able to meet our energy security or affordability goals. Scotland's energy future must also include expansion in energy storage. The wind does not always blow; the sun does not always shine. To make the most of our vast renewable potential, we must invest in large-scale storage, as Martin Whitfield was right to highlight, including pumped hydro and battery technology. The tech exists—it is just not there at scale.

Within that context, we must also consider the role of nuclear power. Scottish Liberal Democrats have always championed an evidence-based approach to decarbonising energy generation, which helps us to reach net zero while meeting Scotland's energy needs safely and affordably. The same commitment to rigorous assessment must apply to all future energy technologies, including new generations of nuclear power. Any evaluation of nuclear power must be based on clear evidence, considering the full life cycle of a technology, from construction to decommissioning and long-term legacy.

Currently, no small modular reactors are operational for power generation. With dozens of different designs under development worldwide, it remains impossible to conduct a fair and comprehensive assessment of their costs, environmental impacts and risks. The developers of SMRs or any other form of new nuclear power would need to demonstrate, beyond reasonable doubt, that their technology is effective, safe, clean

and value for money, and that it carries with it the good wishes of their communities. Crucially, investment in research must not come at the expense of the renewables sector, which already delivers clean, cheaper and faster energy solutions.

Scotland is well placed to lead on the energy transition of our world-class universities, engineering expertise and industrial base provide a strong foundation for advancing cutting-edge technologies. To truly harness those opportunities, the Scottish and UK Governments must go further and work together by ramping up investment in renewables, unlocking green jobs and creating a more prosperous and sustainable energy future.

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

15:54

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** I seem to be speaking a lot about energy recently, and that is not just in the scheduled debates. Energy bills are a pressing concern for folk right across Scotland. Thousands upon thousands of folk are struggling to pay them, and many who would have been comfortable just a few years ago are now feeling the pinch. As if folk were not scunnered enough, they have just heard the news that their bills are due to go up again.

In my Donside constituency, every day this winter, I have heard folks' experiences of fuel poverty. Even in the energy capital of Europe, folk cannot afford their energy bills. That needs to change, and it needs to change soon.

People are not willing to wait two decades for their energy bills to go down. I believe that that is the timeline for a new nuclear power station to be planned and constructed in the UK. It is also a timeline that I do not think delivers for thousands of my constituents who rely on the energy sector for their livelihoods. I will not miss any opportunity to shoehorn in a call for more funding and support for a just transition and to keep making the case for those workers' futures.

To my mind, the future of many of those workers is Scotland's renewable future. We have the energy; we just need the power. Actually, we do not just have the energy, because we have the people as well, and we need to keep them. Since the 1970s, we have assembled one of the best workforces in the world, by training folk locally and encouraging people to move here from far and wide. We have had a little bit of an advantage, because not that many places have oil, and many of the other places that do have it have harsh climates or political regimes that are based on different values to our own.

Although it may feel like we have more wind than most and although our coastline offers huge opportunities, we have to recognise that everywhere has sun, wind and water. Looking ahead, we are now truly competing against the world. If we are going to seize the opportunity to become a net zero capital, we need to act now. We have a huge head start, though, given the amazing workforce that we have. Some of their skills might not match perfectly with what is needed, but Aberdeen has a long history of being able to improvise and adapt.

Our city has been weathered by the North Sea and carved out of granite. It established itself as Europe's oil and gas capital through tremendous engineering feats that saw us extracting oil 100 miles off our coast from miles beneath the surface. Aberdeen has helped to shape the modern world, and it will do so again in the move to net zero. We are the future net zero capital of the world, so the next chapter in Aberdeen's story will see us harness the energy of mother nature.

To make that happen, though, a number of things have to occur. One is investment—in green skills, in the supply chain, in a just transition and in the Acorn project, which should be given the green light. We need certainty. New technologies need price guarantees, and the whole industry has been calling for tax certainty. No other industry sees its taxes vary to the extent that the energy industry has seen over the past few years. Finally, there is migration. We have a track record of assembling the best workforce in the world, but employers across my constituency have told me that they are struggling with the visa rules that are in place now.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Will the member taken an intervention?

**Jackie Dunbar:** I will take an intervention from Mr Kerr. If he is going to speak about nuclear power stations, I would like to ask him where one will go in his region.

**Stephen Kerr:** I will speak about nuclear power stations, but it is not my turn to speak yet—I am just intervening on what Jackie Dunbar has said.

I am interested in her claim, which is right, that we need to invest in skills. How exactly does an SNP Scottish Government invest in skills while slashing the budgets of the college sector? How will investment in skills happen if you are not investing in college education and increasing the number of apprenticeship places in Scotland?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Always speak through the chair.

**Jackie Dunbar:** We have a £500 million just transition fund that will help our workers in the north-east of Scotland and Moray. That is one way of doing it.

Let us contrast that with the alternative. We could dither about for decades to plan and build nuclear power stations, which would then likely take decades longer to break even. It is estimated that Hinkley Point C's construction will cost about £46 billion in today's money—that is for just one plant. I do not for one second believe that MSPs in the chamber who have campaigned against pylons in their constituencies and regions would be willing to welcome a new nuclear power plant in their patches.

At this point, I will take an intervention from any member who wants to campaign for a nuclear power plant in the area that they represent.

**Martin Whitfield:** Will the member give way?

**Jackie Dunbar:** Mr Whitfield, please tell me where the nuclear power station should be.

**Martin Whitfield:** I am more than happy for Torness B to be built in the South Scotland constituency of East Lothian.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jackie Dunbar:** Can I speak? I am aware that I have only 10 seconds left—*[Interruption.]* Mr Kerr, you may laugh, but I have taken your intervention and I have taken Mr Whitfield's.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Speak through the chair. I can give you a little extra time for the interventions, Ms Dunbar.

**Jackie Dunbar:** Thank you.

As I said, if folk truly believe in nuclear power, they would want a plant in their areas, and I am grateful to Mr Whitfield for owning his point of view. I remind members that, as Mr Stewart said, nuclear power stations need pylons to carry electricity. I believe that it was the former Tory Government that denied us the opportunity to have power lines going underground, because that would have cost far too much money.

I want Scotland to become a hub for clean, green and cheap renewable energy. I want a just transition for the north-east. I want Aberdeen to become the net zero capital of the world. I want my constituents to no longer struggle to heat their homes. That is what I want, and the way to realise that is through a renewable future.

16:01

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** In debates such as this, we often get bogged down in arguments about oil and gas versus renewables, net zero versus no net zero and, as is the case with the Government motion, nuclear versus renewables, but it is not as simple as that. The truth is that there is more common ground

than people—even Mr Lumsden—would like to let on that there is. This could have been a positive debate about renewables, because there is a good story to tell on that. Instead, it is a dial-the-clock-back-50-years debate against nuclear, so let me tackle that one first.

The SNP Government's view—we have known about it for years, so we do not need a debate about it—is that Scotland should not build new nuclear because the electricity that is produced is expensive. However, that does not consider the cost of intermittency—the wind not always blowing—or of transmission. Scotland has the most expensive transmission network in the UK, because lots of wind power is generated in rural areas, very far from where it is needed. Stable, predictable and geographically concentrated nuclear is much more straightforward to transmit. Wind energy is available only 45 per cent of the time, and it requires back-up from gas. Nuclear is available 90 per cent of the time and is therefore more reliable.

Germany, Austria and Belgium have seen their carbon emissions rise after the decommissioning of nuclear plants. The advice from the National Energy System Operator—NESO—to the UK Government on how Great Britain can achieve green power by 2030 included contracting more offshore wind capacity, increasing battery capacity, the delivery of carbon capture and nuclear power. The Climate Change Committee has previously suggested a target of 10GW of nuclear by 2025.

I do not often agree with Keir Starmer, but he was right when he said:

“This country hasn't built a nuclear power station in decades. We've been let down, and left behind.

Our energy security has been hostage to Putin for too long, with British prices skyrocketing at his whims.

I'm putting an end to it—changing the rules to back the builders of this nation, and saying no to the blockers who have strangled our chances of cheaper energy, growth and jobs for far too long.”

Hostage to Putin—is that what we really want?

I mentioned Germany, which is a great example of why countries should not phase out nuclear. Germany now burns more coal than anyone else in Europe in order to cover its electricity needs when the wind and sun are down. German industrial and domestic electricity prices are some of the very highest in the European Union—they are about 30 to 50 per cent higher than prices in France, which gets 70 per cent of its electricity from nuclear. German industrial competitiveness is suffering from persistent high electricity prices, which have been caused by the nuclear phase-out. The motion that is being debated is an

example of why we need a change of Government in Scotland.

Let me turn to renewables, because that is an area in which there is some positivity.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Graham Simpson:** Yes.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Mr Simpson ostensibly represents the same people that I do in the Parliament, because the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency is in the Central Scotland region that he represents. He is advocating a new generation of nuclear power stations. Is he suggesting that they should be in Cumbernauld, Kilsyth or anywhere in the Central Scotland region that he represents? We are hearing that there should be new stations—where should they be?

**Graham Simpson:** Nuclear power stations are—if the minister stops interrupting from a sedentary position, I will get the answer out—mostly by the coast. Central Scotland, minister? Think about it.

The recent report from the Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit and Confederation of British Industry economics showed that Scotland has had the UK's highest growth in economic activity from net zero businesses since 2022, and the green sector has grown at breakneck speed—by a fifth. Renewables make up 4.9 per cent of the Scottish economy, generating £9.1 billion in gross value added for Scotland. Over the same period, total employment supported by the net zero economy in Scotland has grown by 19.5 per cent, which is equivalent to 16,500 full-time jobs.

I am worried about Mr Lumsden's blood pressure on many occasions, but today, he was certainly right when he posed the question whether we should put all our eggs in one basket. The answer to that must be no. Energy security and getting bills down have to be a priority. The oil and gas sector supports 83,700 jobs, so we cannot just shut it down. Everyone in the chamber wants Grangemouth—which is in my region—to survive, but they should reflect on their relentlessly negative stance towards what it produces.

If we accept that we need more electricity, we have to get it from A to B. There can be no transition without transmission. Scotland will be a key part of that journey, with billions of pounds invested and the potential to unlock wider economic growth. However, that must be done with community involvement.

**Gillian Martin:** Will the member take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Simpson is bringing his remarks to a close.

**Graham Simpson:** I am just finishing. The Government's bizarre motion should be rejected. We need a mix of electricity supply, and Scotland should play its part in that.

16:08

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I am always very pleased to speak in any debate on energy. As I am a north-east MSP, today's debate on Scotland's renewables future is no exception.

Scotland's offshore energy industry has been a success story for over 50 years. Although we do not need to rehearse the fact that our energy mix is shifting away from oil and gas, it is worth repeating that the tax regime that is connected to Scotland's energy industry has seen hundreds of billions of pounds of tax revenue flow to the UK Government. Scotland has done its share of heavy lifting, heating our homes and businesses and keeping the lights on, and I hope that that continues.

However, as they say, progress is impossible without change, and we are now on a different trajectory, with a unique opportunity to repurpose our energy sector through a managed just transition. As the Deputy First Minister set out last week in a debate on increasing investment in Scotland, renewable energy generation reached a record high in the first half of 2024 and Scotland's net zero sector has grown by more than 20 per cent since 2022. Scotland's renewable energy industry supported more than 42,000 jobs and an economic output of more than £10.1 billion in 2021, according to the Fraser of Allander Institute. The UK's net zero industry is growing three times faster than the overall UK economy, and it generated more than £83 billion for the UK in 2024. I call that a success story.

Some of that success is visible in my Aberdeen South and North Kincardine constituency. One business with more than 40 years of deep-water experience is scaling up its testing of offshore platform technology, which is offering important opportunities for foundation manufacturing in Scotland. Another business is developing a new type of hydrogen storage vessel to support projects that require a method of moving hydrogen to end users. Currently, there is no UK or Scottish manufacturer of that type of storage vessel; such vessels are all imported.

Port of Aberdeen continues on its journey to create an international hub for offshore wind, including by further deepening the south harbour, and the brilliant Net Zero Technology Centre's TechX clean energy accelerator programme supports unbelievably talented clean energy start-

ups to continue their journey in accelerating the transition to a net zero industry.

Of course, there are challenges relating to planning, regulatory processes and financial mechanisms. That last point has been raised with me recently by several businesses that are seeking to expand and would like a clearer shared investment strategy between the Scottish and UK Governments that will provide confidence to underpin the level of investment that is required to unlock infrastructure projects. That is particularly relevant to our port infrastructure in enabling authorities, including Port of Aberdeen, to support floating offshore wind projects. I am grateful to the cabinet secretary and the minister for their respective engagement on that issue.

I also welcome the cabinet secretary's acknowledgement that the good practice principles must be improved and that community benefit must be ramped up—football shirts and pocket parks do not cut it. However, I remind Mr Lumsden that he inserted an industrial development on a treasured green space in my constituency, known as St Fittick's park, with absolutely no consultation when he was one of the leaders of Aberdeen City Council, so we must all be genuine in our commentary on community benefit.

At last week's meeting of the cross-party group on renewable energy and energy efficiency, we heard concerns about zonal pricing, which is being considered by the UK Government as part of its energy pricing mechanism review. We heard that industry bodies, trade unions and investors are very concerned that the proposal will have a material impact on the scale of the renewables sector's investment in Scotland and on our ability to drive key projects and unlock jobs in the supply chain here. I would very much welcome an update on the Scottish Government's position on that issue in the minister's summing-up speech.

Reducing energy bills sits at the heart of our energy thinking. SSE's detailed briefing sets out the challenges of our antiquated and absurd electricity charging system very well. It references analysis by Scottish Renewables that an average 1GW Scottish offshore wind project would pay £38 million a year to use the electricity network, whereas an identical wind farm in the congested seas off England's south coast would get a £7 million payment for the same service. That is utterly unbelievable, so the regime needs urgent reform.

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** How much would consumers pay in that scenario?

**Audrey Nicoll:** I do not know, but I would imagine that they would not pay any more—I would hope that they would pay less.

That allows me to segue to my final position on nuclear power, which was shaped in no small part by my working-class parents, who saw that energy option as an insult to Scotland.

The debate on nuclear has moved on, and although the new UK Government continues with its plans to boost nuclear power in England and Wales, I fail to understand the rationale for supporting an energy source that produces vast quantities of waste from which radioactivity takes decades to reduce to safe levels, is vastly more expensive than renewables, takes decades to build, cannot be switched on and off easily and is potentially dangerous and contaminating. I also agree with Patrick Harvie's point—we must all get real about our own behaviour and our energy use.

To conclude, nuclear is not an option for Scotland; an exciting future supporting a world-leading renewables industry is.

16:15

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** I share the aspirations that have been expressed across the chamber and agree that Scotland has huge potential to lead the way on the renewable future. It is unfortunate that we have been such a laggard up to this point, and it is frustrating that we have missed huge opportunities over the generations.

I look, for example, at the contrast in the fortunes of Denmark's Vestas and Scotland's Howden. I will take that as one case study. Thirty-five years ago, in 1989—the very year that I was born—Scotland exited the manufacturing of wind turbines, and the works that built those pioneering wind turbines now lie derelict on the south side of Glasgow. That could have been a huge opportunity if we had persevered with more state investment in wind turbines at the early stage. We now see the huge advantage that other countries have in stitching up the global supply chain for wind turbines.

Our particularly harsh weather, extensive coastline and thousands of lochs mean that Scotland boasts a unique environment that is well suited to the installation of wind, hydroelectric and tidal power. I just wish that we were making more of the infrastructure that is required.

That said, it is also irresponsible of the Government here in Scotland not to support a new generation of nuclear energy as part of the mix. Britain and Scotland were the world's first civil generator of nuclear power, with Calder Hall and Chapelcross in the 1950s. Unfortunately, that industrial leadership was lost through a lack of planning and the break-up of our vertically integrated electricity generation and transmission system in the 1990s.

The Government's ideological opposition to new nuclear power stations is holding Scotland back from billions of pounds of potential investment and thousands of highly skilled jobs. It does not have to be an either/or—it is a false dichotomy. We can be a clean energy superpower through renewable technologies and new civil nuclear power working in concert.

It is, after all, clear that intermittency is the fundamental challenge, particularly with wind turbine installations. Wind power technology is available only 25 per cent to 45 per cent of the time, while nuclear energy provides a 90 per cent stable base-load supply, which means that we are able to augment intermittency with a stable baseline. That is the fundamental reconciliation that is needed.

When we discuss nuclear power, we are often haunted by past generations of nuclear reactor technologies. Even the Hinkley Point C technology is not appropriate for Scotland. The European pressurised water reactor technology was described by Cambridge Professor Roulstone as a “cathedral within a cathedral”, or an overengineered system that is already obsolete. Technology has already evolved. New, cleaner and neater options are available today, which could be used to help to repower existing nuclear sites in Scotland, such as Torness and Hunterston.

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The member is so right. I need only look at 3 November, when 50 per cent of our energy came from gas, 30 per cent from nuclear and 3 per cent from wind. Can he explain why the Government is so against nuclear, except when the wind does not blow and it is prepared to accept nuclear power from France to keep the lights on in Scotland?

**Paul Sweeney:** The member highlights the fallacy and logical inconsistency that lie at the heart of the Government's position. It is largely a sunk-cost fallacy—the Government has been so wedded to that position for so long that it is hard for it to walk back from it.

Rolls-Royce has developed new small modular reactor technology, which is around a third of the size of second-generation nuclear plant, such as the existing advanced gas-cooled reactor fleet in Scotland. That would give us the ability to use the existing turbine plant at the sites that I mentioned and to repower them at a fraction of the capital cost of building a new nuclear power station from scratch.

SMRs are also well suited to replacing fossil-fuel fired plants. For example, Longannet had the same generator plant as Hunterston and Torness. It was a shame that it was dynamited and cleared

when it could have been repowered using SMRs. We can utilise more of those sites and, in doing so, generate power more efficiently.

It was also really disappointing to learn that, in 2022, the Scottish Government fundamentally rejected any proposal from Ineos and Rolls-Royce to power the Grangemouth refinery using a small modular reactor. We know that the reason why petrochemicals in this country are quickly becoming uncompetitive is the throttling of competitive manufacturing due to high gas prices, which drive our electricity costs. We must avoid missing other opportunities like that and move to a more pragmatic approach whereby nuclear energy is part of the mix. Mr Simpson mentioned what has happened in Germany, which is a warning sign for what could happen in the UK—indeed, it is happening, with the high industrial energy costs that we have here.

We must also take cognisance of what one of our best-ever engineers, the late Sir Donald Miller, told us more than a decade ago. He mentioned that, when he retired from the South of Scotland Electricity Board in the early 1990s, he could take a great deal of satisfaction from the fact that Scotland had

“one of the most secure and cost effective systems” of electricity generation worldwide. He said:

“Some 60% of our energy was from nuclear and with the hydro we could, incidentally, also claim to be one of the greenest systems with the lowest carbon emissions.”

He added that

“The coal fired station at Longannet”—

which was recently decommissioned but was groundbreaking when it was built—

“was used mainly for back up and profitable exports to England for the benefit of Scottish consumers.”

However, he said:

“Today we see a very different picture. The decommissioning of our conventional generation is fast approaching”—

since then, it has approached—

“and yet there are no plans to replace the generating capacity at Longannet or the nuclear. Even more incomprehensible is that we shall, in a few years, be importing power for much of the time from the new nuclear station to be built just over the border in England”.

As he said, we may wonder

“just why Scotland (birthplace of so much engineering)— and a pioneer of nuclear energy—

“should be importing power we could well generate here, exporting highly skilled jobs in the process. And moreover ending up with the least reliable and insecure electricity supply that we have seen for a hundred years. And this at a time when electricity has never been more important in the lifeblood of modern society.”



The words of the late Donald Miller ring very true today. It was rather prophetic of him to say that 10 years ago. I wish that the Government would take more cognisance of the expertise in this country and harness it to deliver a true industrial renaissance.

16:21

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** Scotland's energy future is in renewables, and nowhere is that clearer than in my constituency of Banffshire and Buchan Coast. My communities have powered Scotland for generations through fishing and energy and, now, the opportunities that they have with a just transition. However, as with all industries, that transition must not be something that is done to the people—it must be done with them.

We have everything that we need right here—wind, water and a skilled workforce. If we get this right, we will not just keep the lights on but build a sustainable future in which our communities benefit from real investment and lasting opportunities.

**Douglas Lumsden:** We have heard that ministers refuse to meet community groups. Will Karen Adam go and meet community groups—there are many in her constituency—who have real concerns about pylons, substations and batteries?

**Karen Adam:** I meet community groups regularly. If anyone emails me asking for a meeting, I will meet them. However, Alasdair Allan clearly set out earlier that ministers are not permitted to meet those community groups. It is not allowed. I do not want his words to be twisted.

Our focus should be on our renewables and not on nuclear, which is slow, costly and, ultimately, a bad deal for Scotland. The UK Government's nuclear projects are billions over budget and years behind schedule, and, ultimately, taxpayers are forced to foot that bill. Meanwhile, Scotland's renewables are delivering right now, providing clean energy, cutting costs and creating jobs. We cannot afford to waste any more time looking backwards.

As we move forward with offshore wind, we must also stand with the people whose lives and livelihoods revolve around Scotland's seas. That is why I established the cross-party group on fisheries and coastal communities. Fishers deserve a seat at the table, too. I thank the cabinet secretary, Gillian Martin, for attending one of our cross-party meetings. It was greatly appreciated.

The fishers do not just work the sea; they know it, and their knowledge of the waters, ecosystems and realities of the industry must not be ignored.

Offshore wind and other developments must be done with them and not to them. If we are serious about a just transition, we must engage early, listen properly and respect the generations of expertise, rather than bringing them in as an afterthought when the plans are signed off. The industry puts low-carbon, high-protein diets on our plates, and that matters.

One company that shows how that can be done well is Ocean Winds. I have met its team regularly—I did so most recently at an event that I hosted here in the Parliament. With its Moray east and Moray west developments, it is set to become the largest offshore wind operator in the country. Its Moray west operations and maintenance base in Buckie is proof of what real investment in renewables can do. A few short years ago, Buckie harbour looked different from how it looks now. It is bringing in new businesses, new jobs and new opportunities. That is the real-world impact of renewables.

However, opportunity does not come without challenge. Higher transmission charges in Scotland make it more expensive than anywhere else in the UK for our offshore wind developers to connect to the grid. Those additional costs could slow our investment. That is unacceptable. To unlock the full potential of offshore wind, we need to have a fairer system that does not penalise Scotland for leading the way.

Another key issue is harbour and port capacity building. That is why Fraserburgh harbour and other ports across my constituency are critical to the conversation. Fraserburgh has big ambitions. I regularly meet Pamela Neri and her team, and I champion the harbour's master plan with every chance that I get. If we back Fraserburgh properly, it can become a major hub for offshore wind, thereby strengthening supply chains, securing long-term prosperity and creating the jobs that are needed for our local communities.

We need to remember what a just transition means. It is about not just energy but people; it is about valuing the industries and expertise that we already have and making sure that they have a future in a low-carbon Scotland. That means listening to our fishers and investing in our ports. For example, we have an incredible opportunity to be a hub for manufacturing. By linking with local colleges and schools to support the supply chain with a labour force, we can ensure that renewables create jobs and prosperity in the communities that need those things most.

However, while Scotland pushes forward, Labour and the Tories would throw billions at nuclear, despite it being slow, expensive and out of reach for ordinary folk. Their track record speaks for itself—for example, Hinkley Point, which has been mentioned, is billions over budget,

years behind schedule and still nowhere near delivering energy. Meanwhile, Scotland's renewables are already cutting costs and creating jobs. Why would we choose outdated, overpriced and unreliable technology over a proven home-grown industry?

Scotland is leading not only in clean energy but in showing the world what a fair and inclusive transition looks like, yet, last week, the Conservatives voted against the Scottish Government's budget, which included £237 million for ports and harbours. That is unacceptable.

I am proud to have voted for more investment in our coastal communities. However, we must not stop there. Let us get this right and power on with renewables—for Scotland, our coastal communities and, ultimately, our future.

16:27

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow Karen Adam, but she needs to realise that, when we vote for a budget, we do not get to pick and choose which lines to support but have to take it as a whole.

Winston Churchill—who was quoted by Fergus Ewing—said:

"The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty."

The SNP Government is nothing if not pessimistic. At every turn, it blocks progress, stifles ambition and clings to outdated dogma and ideology. It is time for Scotland to start seeing the opportunities that are before us, and I agree with Graham Simpson that that will take a change of Scottish Government. The SNP will not change. The change that we look for means embracing nuclear energy—the opposite of the motion in the name of the cabinet secretary. That will be part of our clean, secure and prosperous future. However, the SNP and the Greens want to take Scotland down a dead-end road where energy insecurity, high prices and economic decline await us. Their opposition to nuclear power is based not on science or economics, but on blind ideology.

Recently, I met young Scottish apprentices who were working in the nuclear sector. They were bright, ambitious and highly skilled. Their futures were exciting. They were at the forefront of an industry that offers some of the best-paid, most secure and most future-proof jobs in the world.

**Karen Adam:** On the point about economic opportunities, the CBI reported last week that the net zero industry is growing three times faster than the overall UK economy, providing high-wage jobs and boosting energy security. What does the member say in response to that?

**Stephen Kerr:** I say that we can have it all in Scotland—we can have it all. It is not either/or.

I go back to my young Scottish apprentices. The sad reality, and the indictment of this so-called nationalist Government—it is a very strange nationalism—is that, if they want to pursue their careers, they will have to leave Scotland. That is not just bad policy; it is a betrayal of Scotland's future.

If we are serious about cutting emissions, getting energy prices lower and securing thousands of skilled jobs for generations to come, we must invest in nuclear energy, particularly SMRs. Nuclear is now one of the safest, most reliable and cleanest energy sources in the world, and SMRs are quicker to build. There is a lot of propaganda about how long it takes, but they are quicker to build, cheaper to operate and far more flexible.

**Alasdair Allan:** The member mentioned that the idea that it might take a while to build nuclear power stations in Scotland to address our energy needs is simply propaganda. How long does he think that it might take?

**Stephen Kerr:** The record shows that SMRs can be built in between seven and 10 years. That is very realistic, and it is why we should not be turning up our noses at SMRs in Scotland.

**Paul Sweeney:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Stephen Kerr:** I will give way one more time.

**Paul Sweeney:** Does the member recognise that a reactor pressure vessel for an SMR could be built at, for example, Rosyth and then taken by barge to Torness and connected to the existing turbine hall there, which would be a fairly easy job, in relative terms?

**Stephen Kerr:** I bow before the expertise of Paul Sweeney on these matters, but that sounds exciting to me. That sounds like the kind of future that I want for Scotland and for the people who will live in Scotland.

SMRs take up less space than wind farms and can be located close to where the power is needed. That is critical in relation to the controversies about transmission. Nuclear power stations can be built nearer to where the power will be used, and they run 24/7. They are not weather dependent. As we have heard countless times in this debate, they are the perfect complement to intermittent renewables such as wind and solar when, for example, the sun does not shine, and they create thousands of high-quality jobs in engineering and construction in relation to operations and maintenance.

And here is the kicker: the UK Government—both the previous Conservative one and this Labour one—already backs SMRs. Where is the SNP? It is standing in the way. Billions of pounds of investment and talent could flow into Scotland if we got behind nuclear, boosting our economy instead of watching investment and talent heading out of Scotland to England and Wales or abroad. Scottish businesses and universities could lead in nuclear innovation, attracting global talent and cementing our place as a leader in clean energy technology. However, instead of grasping those opportunities, the SNP banned nuclear outright, shutting Scotland out of a rapidly expanding and exciting global industry.

The United States, China, Canada and EU countries are investing heavily in nuclear, but not Scotland. Meanwhile, the SNP wants to cling on—for comfort, I think—as it sinks to its outdated 1970s anti-nuclear rhetoric while pretending that renewables alone can meet all of Scotland's energy needs.

**Gillian Martin:** Will the member take an intervention?

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

**Stephen Kerr:** The SNP is failing Scotland's workers, offering them false promises of green jobs without delivering real long-term opportunities. It is failing Scotland's households, and it is failing future generations. If we are serious about having a secure, low-carbon and prosperous future, we must embrace a balanced energy mix that combines renewables, oil and gas for transition, and nuclear. That means lifting Scotland's nuclear ban and allowing SMRs to be built in Scotland close to where the power is needed. That means supporting nuclear apprenticeships—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Kerr, you need to conclude.

**Stephen Kerr:** I will.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes, but now, please.

**Stephen Kerr:** That means making Scotland a leader in nuclear innovation. How on earth can you—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Fergus Ewing, to be followed by Emma Harper.

16:34

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** When I had the privilege of being Scotland's energy minister, for five years from 2011, I was honoured, during a visit to the European Marine Energy Centre in Orkney, to breakfast with the

great Norwegian Fred Olsen. He gave me some advice that helped to shape our then policy and that has remained with me. He explained that, because Scotland has deeper waters than those in the south of England, we would find over time that the cost of constructing offshore wind farms would be far greater if they were fixed to the sea bed, because that sea bed is deeper in Scotland than in the south of England. Therefore, over time, floating offshore wind would give Scotland an innate advantage, not least because turbines could be located to take advantage of different wind directions, so that, when the wind was not blowing in one direction, the floating turbines could be relocated to the most efficacious location for generation.

The Hywind project was the world's first commercial array of floating offshore wind turbines, and I am indebted to my friend Halfdan Brustad of Equinor for ensuring that some work for part of that project came to Global Energy, although I question how much of the value will accrue to Scotland over time in the form of renewables.

We discussed Ukraine earlier today, and I am bound to reflect that, within the past 24 hours, the Norwegian Government has confirmed that it is now considering utilising its sovereign wealth fund to assist Ukraine. That sovereign wealth fund is currently worth almost £1.4 trillion. For those of us who, like me, are unfamiliar with that particular figure, that is £1,380 billion. That fund came about because Norway invested what it earned from its vast oil and gas resources. The Norwegians did not even put any money in for the first five years, until 1990 or thereabouts.

**Tess White:** Will Mr Ewing address two points? First, there is the issue of the Scottish Government selling the sea bed off cheaply and not using the money to invest in new energies.

My second question is being asked for the people who are in the gallery today, who have come from the north-east and really want to hear this. What is Mr Ewing's view on bringing people along with you and not taking away prime and productive arable land or destroying their homeland in the process?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms White—that is quite enough. We will go back to Mr Ewing for a response to those points.

**Fergus Ewing:** I think I will leave the first point. I am not sure that I would accept that, but, to be candid, I have not made a specific study of the matter and it would therefore be wrong for me to form a view. I know that it is a bit of a novelty not to form a view when one is unacquainted with the facts, but I am an old-fashioned kind of guy. I will come to the second point.

I was about to say that I think there is a necessary future for oil and gas in Scotland and the UK but that it is dwindling and the cessation of production that we are talking about means that fields such as Rosebank and Jackdaw are, frankly, *de minimis* in relation to global production. There are 100 million barrels of oil—or the gas equivalent—in the world every day, but we, in the UK, do not contribute much more than about 1 per cent of that. Our Green colleagues would like to see the reduction and elimination of all future developments—even though we have invested billions of pounds in them and the taxpayer would have to get that money back—but that would be completely futile, because we produce only 0.1 per cent of the world's carbon emissions. If Scotland ceased to exist, that would not make the slightest difference to global warming, and nor would anything that we do.

We do need gas storage, as Britain's storage capacity is about 10 times less than that of Germany, the Netherlands or France. My friend Charles Hendry, an excellent former UK energy minister, has been making that point for a long time.

I have made this point before and I will make it again: communities need to come with us on this journey towards renewables. It is a journey that I started off. This will not make me popular with some of the audience in the public gallery, but I possibly granted more consents than any other minister in Europe in my time. They should please feel free to boo—sorry, they are not allowed to do that. *[Interruption.]*

To be serious, the opposition is growing. It is growing in the Highlands and it is growing in Aberdeenshire and in the south of Scotland. The way to deal with it is for the UK Government and the Scottish Government to revive the scheme that I was pleased to take forward with some good officials, whereby communities were provided with 10 per cent or thereabouts of the capital cost of a share in a development by the renewable energy investment fund—

**Gillian Martin:** Will the member give way?

**Fergus Ewing:** I am sorry, but I do not have time. I have just 10 seconds left.

There was assistance with that, with 90 per cent of the funding coming from a variety of banks. That can happen, and it should happen. If it does happen, not all but some people will come with us on this journey as volunteers, not conscripts.

16:40

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I will start, as others have, by discussing the development of nuclear power and highlighting the

calls for increased spend on nuclear power. We know that one plant alone, Hinkley Point C, is projected to cost around £46 billion in construction costs. I am a bit dumfooned as to how we can call nuclear “clean and green” when hazardous and toxic waste needs to be handled safely. There is a reason why nuclear decommissioning—

**Kevin Stewart:** Ms Harper highlights Hinkley Point and the £46 billion or so in costs. Quite close to Emma Harper's region, of course, is Sellafield. In October last year, *The Guardian* reported that the costs for clearing up Sellafield had reached £136 billion. Does Emma Harper think that that is a worthwhile cost? Is it worth paying that amount for clean-up when we could have clean energy—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, I think that we have got the gist. Ms Harper.

**Emma Harper:** I visited Chapelcross recently and part of the conversation was about the ongoing clean-up. There is a reason why nuclear decommissioning takes decades and requires many different highly skilled professionals to safely decommission sites such as Chapelcross, on the other side of the Solway from Sellafield.

The massive cost of new nuclear is no way to run an energy policy and no legacy to leave future generations—it simply adds nuclear waste to the carbon waste that we are already bequeathing them. We need renewables not only to reduce the pollution that is emitted now but to minimise the impact on our descendants who will live in our land decades and centuries from now. That is why I want to recognise Scotland's renewables revolution and remind members of the huge role that South Scotland is playing in it.

We have one of the biggest offshore wind farms in the country at Robin Rigg in the Solway Firth, although it is a source of continued annoyance that all the energy that is generated goes to the south side of the Solway and the marine support is carried out from Workington port rather than from Galloway.

The Galloway hydro scheme is now over 90 years old. It was designed and built at a time when terms such as “renewables” and “net zero” were not part of our daily lingo. The generating stations run by Drax along the route have a generating capacity of 110MW. That hydro power legacy continues to be shaped in the present day, marrying the old with the new. Right now, just outside Kelloholm, the former Glenmuckloch opencast coal mine is being repurposed into a major hydro-pumped storage facility.

I thank the First Minister for visiting The Carbon Removers at Crofthead farm near Crocketford in January this year, where I also went on an earlier visit with the cabinet secretary. The First Minister was able to witness the technology that is being

developed there for carbon capture, storage and processing. After the visit, The Carbon Removers announced a deal for carbon capture and storage in the North Sea, securing existing jobs and creating new high-quality, high-skilled roles in the technologies of the future, not just in that area but in Dumfriesshire as well. That is exactly what the just transition should be about; it is for all of us.

I have visited, on a number of occasions, a local employer that contributes well to Scotland's renewables industry—Natural Power, near Dalry in the Glenkens area. I was able to secure a British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly economy committee visit to Natural Power as part of that committee's inquiry into energy policy across the islands. Jeremy Sainsbury, who is the Great Britain policy director at Natural Power—

**Finlay Carson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Emma Harper:** Just give me a wee second.

Jeremy Sainsbury and his team made us so welcome and provided an excellent overview of some of Natural Power's work in managing the energy that is generated by onshore turbines across the whole UK.

I will take an intervention from Mr Carson.

**Finlay Carson:** Ministers are expected to observe the principles of public life, known as the Nolan principles, which include duty and respect. They outline ethical expectations for those in public life, reflecting the behaviours that the public expects of office bearers.

Given the number of applications in Dumfries and Galloway that have been rejected by the public and by the council with the decision subsequently overturned by this Government—including the Kendoon to Tongland reinforcement project, on which the Government overruled an independent reporter—does the member believe that her Government is working to the Nolan principles and respecting the rights of those living in Galloway who reject the industrialisation of rural Galloway?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Okay—I think that we have got the gist. I call Ms Harper.

**Emma Harper:** I thank Mr Carson for that intervention speech.

We need infrastructure to back up the new renewables, but it needs to be balanced. I know that a controversial decision was made last week on the Kendoon to Tongland pylon replacement project, but I think that the people in Galloway acknowledge the need for power—they just wanted the line to be undergrounded where appropriate, so I have a lot of sympathy with what Finlay Carson talked about in his intervention.

Nevertheless, I am clear that we need to focus on what we can do to improve our renewable energy in the south of Scotland, not only in Dumfries and Galloway but across the Borders.

The south, like the country as a whole, is awash with renewables operating right now, as well as future potential. However—and there is a “however”—it is scandalous that the price that every household in my region pays for its electricity is so much higher than in other parts of the UK. Standard charges for southern Scotland are 54 per cent higher per day than for customers in London. Even with changes that are coming soon, the cost will still be 22 per cent higher for a constituent who is living literally right next door to our generating sites.

I am conscious of the time, Deputy Presiding Officer—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes, Ms Harper—you will need to conclude.

**Emma Harper:** Yes—I am conscious of the time.

As a final point, if we had full control over energy in Scotland—over pricing, distribution and everything else—a just transition is what we could achieve. We could make things better for people if we had independence.

16:47

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests with regard to community wind power.

I begin by thanking the SNP for finally bringing to the chamber a debate on nuclear energy. It has taken a long time. Time and again, the subject has been raised in the chamber, and we have argued for a serious discussion about Scotland's energy future and about how we are going to keep the lights on, industry running and bills down. Yet, despite the grandstanding that we hear from the SNP and Green members on energy policy, it has been a long time since they have actually given Parliament the chance to debate nuclear power in Government time. I welcome the debate—better late than never.

As the motion sets out, and as we have heard, nuclear power is apparently too dangerous and expensive, and Scotland does not need it. That is the same SNP that told us that we could run the country on wind and wishful thinking, and that importing gas from Norway was somehow better than using all the tools at our disposal to secure our own energy future. It is the same SNP—and the same Green party—that would rather see Scotland rely on imported nuclear energy from

England and France than for us to generate it ourselves.

We have had contributions from Douglas Lumsden and Graham Simpson, and I thank them for referring to the strike price, which is £172 per megawatt hour for tidal stream and £139 per megawatt hour for floating offshore. More importantly, they referred to the fact that both those sources of energy can provide, at the most, 60 per cent reliability, whereas nuclear power can provide 90 per cent. That is important, because it is about how we keep the lights on.

What is at stake here are jobs, investment and energy security. Torness nuclear power station, in the south of Scotland constituency of East Lothian, has been the cornerstone of Scotland's energy supply for more than 35 years, producing clean, reliable electricity for millions of homes and generating more than 1,200MW of power. More importantly, it provides strong union-supported jobs with a good employer.

Torness employs 700 people on site, and nearly 2,000 further jobs are supported through the supply chain. That means that 700 families rely on the wages of 700 workers whose expertise is keeping Scotland's lights on. Each worker has a gross value added of more than £102,000, while the average gross value added for workers in Scotland is just £53,000. Torness has contributed more than £16 billion to the UK. When we talk about nuclear power, we are talking about those real livelihoods, real people and real communities.

Last December, EDF announced that it would extend to 2030 the lifespan of Torness. That was the right decision because it protects jobs, keeps bills lower and avoids shutting down a major source of clean energy. However, what happens after 2030?

**Fergus Ewing:** Can Martin Whitfield answer the question about the costs of decommissioning nuclear stations? Although the work is welcome at Dounreay, I understand—at least from the internet—that it was announced last month that the clean-up operation will continue until the 2070s, which is 40 years later than the previous date. The cost of the programme, which was previously £2.9 billion, will now be £7.9 billion. Surely that must be taken into account when considering what forms of generation to invest in.

**Martin Whitfield:** I am grateful for that intervention, because it allows me to deal with the question of nuclear waste, which has arisen in a number of contributions.

To put it into some context, there are two parts to the waste. There is the high-level, highly contaminated waste, which amounts to about 3 per cent and is approximately the size of a dishwasher tablet for every person in the UK. We

could talk about the 15 million radioactive material packages that are transported annually worldwide, but have never resulted in one harmful incident. That is thanks to the robust packaging and strict safety standards that the industry adheres to at every level, and to the cost of the nuclear waste management.

Nuclear power is, of course, the only power generation where the cost at the end of production is already factored into the price. The cost of nuclear waste management is well understood and accounts for about 10 per cent of the total costs of generating nuclear power, which ensures its economic feasibility. However, there is no provision in the strike price of wind turbines for what we do at the end of their life after 20 or 30 years.

I am conscious of time, Deputy Presiding Officer, and I would have liked the opportunity to talk about small modular reactors, which have been raised a number of times today and have a huge potential to benefit Scotland.

We require a mix of our energy production if we are to ensure that the bills are kept low and that we have security with regard to what is happening in the world. If nuclear power is not part of that solution, the SNP Government will owe a great debt in the future when the lights go out.

16:53

**Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** During the course of the debate so far, there have been points of division about whether nuclear should be part of our future energy mix, but there are clearly points of agreement, in particular around the value of renewables to our economy and the desire to ensure that we maximise that economic benefit for Scotland as a whole.

Just last week, the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit published a report that highlighted the value of the renewable energy sector to Scotland, which is increasing year on year. The renewable energy sector is critical to us in supporting the delivery of a just transition as we decarbonise our energy system.

That just transition is dependent on us being able to deliver not just the projects that are renewable, but the technology that goes alongside them—turbines, nacelles, blades and towers—all of which go into the mix and which we need to start manufacturing in Scotland if we are to deliver a just transition.

In order for those projects to become a reality and get to the point when a financial investment decision can be made, they require assurance around being able to connect to the national grid.

Although there has been investment in renewable projects over the past decade-plus, there has not been the level of investment that has been needed in our grid infrastructure to meet the ever-increasing demand. The decisions that were made by the previous Conservative Government to increase our dependency on renewables—offshore renewables in particular—have resulted in a need to significantly increase the capacity in our grid infrastructure. Although we all want renewables to be successful and for them to be a growing part of our economy, the reality is that grid investment needs to take place in order to achieve that.

I recognise the concerns and issues that communities have about some of that investment and those projects as they move forward. It is important that we ensure that our distribution network operators are held to account and pressed to ensure that they minimise the potential impact that they will have on communities where that can reasonably be done.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Part of the solution to the megapylons that are going through areas such as the Borders and that are greatly unpopular with lots of communities would be to look at the national planning framework 4 to give communities a greater say. Does the member agree with doing that?

**Michael Matheson:** We should always try to make sure that we use the system as best we can. However, using terms such as “megapylons” does not help the reality of what we are trying to deal with, which is to make sure that we have the right grid infrastructure in place. For example, in my constituency, new pylon networks are being introduced, and I recently met with SP Energy Networks to discuss that. There will be concerns about these issues, but we have to decarbonise our energy system as a result of decisions that were made by the previous Conservative Government and that will have to be delivered. We have to try to make sure that we address those issues as well.

I respect those who are pro a greater use of nuclear power in our energy mix and who are in favour of SMRs, but we need to be cautious and recognise that SMRs are an unproven technology. They have not even yet completed the generic design assessment process in the UK. At this point, there are no SMRs in the world that are operating commercially. We also have to recognise that, once they get regulatory approval, it will take some time for them to be delivered. It is highly unlikely that they will play a significant part in our future energy mix this side of the next 15 years.

On that point, I turn to a technology that has served us well for many decades, which is

pumped storage hydro. When the late Tom Johnston was Secretary of State for Scotland, he created the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board for two purposes. The first was to bring electricity to the Highlands and the second was for the betterment of the Highlands. Thankfully, the Highlands have electricity these days.

Unfortunately, when I was the Scottish energy secretary, the energy secretary in England, Kwasi Kwarteng, was not persuaded by my argument that we should put a cap-and-floor model in place in order to have a new age of pumped storage in Scotland. His argument was that this is a Scottish issue and it was not one that the UK Government was interested in at that point.

However, we are now at the point of a new age of pumped storage in Scotland. Last week in the Parliament, I had the opportunity to chair an event for the British Hydropower Association, at which there was real enthusiasm about the new cap-and-floor model that is being brought in by Ofgem for long-duration energy storage to unlock what could be nine megaprojects in Scotland. Those projects would deliver more than 5GW of additional capacity and more than 200 gigawatt hours of energy would be produced from those new hydro projects.

**Paul Sweeney:** Will the member give way?

**Sarah Boyack:** Will the member take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is concluding.

**Michael Matheson:** All of that would play an important part in making sure that we have the mix in our energy system that we require and that, at the same time, we receive the economic benefits that come from those projects.

I hope that, as we go forward, we will not only start to focus on the new technologies but also recognise that some of the long-standing, reliable technologies such as pumped storage hydro can play a large part in Scotland’s future energy mix in the years ahead.

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

16:59

**Patrick Harvie:** We have heard some well-reasoned, thoughtful and well-informed speeches; we have heard some bluster as well. In particular, some of the SMR boosterism has been a little bit overblown and silly. In their speeches, some members were pretty much saying, “SMRs are just lovely. SMRs are modern. SMRs are just wonderful, and they’ll solve every problem.” I was pleased that Michael Matheson tried to burst that

bubble. At one point, I almost thought that I was hearing Sir Humphrey Appleby telling his minister, “SMRs are quite simply the nuclear power station Harrods would sell you.” We should attach to some of those speeches the same kind of absurdity that we would to those performances.

SMRs have not been proven anywhere in the world. In fact, I draw members’ attention to the comments of the Environmental Audit Committee at the UK Parliament, which wrote last year to the outgoing UK Government expressing doubts on SMRs. When referring to whichever reactor wins the UK design competition, it said:

“It seems unlikely that the reactor will be contributing generating capacity to the grid until 2035, which is the date by when the Government expects the GB electricity grid to have been decarbonised.”

The new UK Government wants to decarbonise the grid by 2030. SMRs will play no role in doing that, even if somebody somewhere in the world cracks the many challenges in making them viable.

I want to talk a little bit about how this debate links to the previous statement on the geopolitical changes that we are seeing around the world. There is a profound link to energy policy, and there is a good reason why many of my colleagues in the European Green Party have used slogans such as “More wind, less war” and “Less power from gas, less power for Putin.”

The way in which we move away from fossil fuels, which have been used as a geopolitical weapon by global bullies for decades—even for generations—needs to be accelerated. Some people say that nuclear power can be part of the shift away from fossil fuels, but nuclear power is still based on and would still bake in the reliance on a fixed, finite commodity—high-grade uranium ore—and whoever ends up possessing that commodity. If the world was to commit to a transition away from fossil fuels that was fundamentally based on nuclear power, we would simply be redesigning that same dynamic but with a different commodity—not fossil fuels, but high-grade uranium ore—and future generations would come to curse our name for having made that mistake.

Various members have talked about fairness in that transition. I spoke in particular about fairness in terms of cost, contrasting the low, low cost of production of clean, green, renewable electricity with the high cost of consumption. That fundamental injustice needs to be changed. I wish to goodness that we could change that here in Scotland. In its review of pricing, the UK Government must be put under pressure to break the link between fossil fuel prices and electricity prices, so that people are given a real incentive for

people to shift away from fossil fuels for their heat and their transport.

**Paul Sweeney:** The member will be as familiar as I am with the Queens Quay district heat network. The scaling of that Glasgow-built technology has been undermined because of the addiction to gas pricing, which is driving electricity costs, which in turn makes it uncompetitive relative to gas for heating.

**Patrick Harvie:** Yes, indeed. Up until recently, there has been a complete lack of consumer protection in heat networks, and that needs to be fixed. We have been learning lessons from countries such as Denmark on how to do heat networks well, and we need to continue to do so.

Some people have posited the issue of fairness purely in terms of the favourability of particular types of energy infrastructure. Do people want a pylon built? Do people want wind turbines? Do people want this infrastructure or that infrastructure? I would make the case that all energy infrastructure brings controversy with it. When I was first elected, Scotland was still burning coal to generate electricity, communities not so far away from where I live were blighted with open-cast coal extraction, and businesses had an abysmal track record in protecting communities from environmental harm, seeking constantly to expand that open-cast coal extraction.

With regard to the infrastructure, every solution—every choice that we might make about what energy system we should build—will bring controversy with it.

However, I am looking at the moment at recent polling by YouGov on public support for the UK getting more energy from different types of sources. The overwhelming support is for tidal, solar, offshore wind, hydroelectric, geothermal and onshore wind, and there is fairly strong support for biofuels. The public view was fairly mixed and balanced on nuclear, and the public view on fossil fuel was strongly opposed. I think that we need to recognise that aspect.

There is not time to address everything that I would like to have said. However, I will say that, notwithstanding some of the anti-net zero comments that we have heard today, which would have been more at home at a conference of the Heartland Institute or the Reform Party—perhaps one or two members have decided to jump ship early—there is a question around just transition. Just transition needs to be more than a phrase, and it will not be if we leave the political and economic power with the corporates, the billionaires and the shareholders and investors, who will only ever serve their own short-term interests. Governments need to make a just



transition happen. That has not been happening so far.

Whether the issue is Grangemouth, the North Sea industries, or oil and gas companies slashing their already meagre renewables investment, or every household in the country worried about its energy bills and wanting to shift away from fossil fuels affordably, the market will not deliver—Government must.

17:06

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I am glad to add my voice to those who welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is engaging on the nuclear agenda, and that that is happening following so closely after the announcements at the Scottish Labour Party conference. Anas Sarwar has thrown down the gauntlet to the Government to deal in reality and seize the energy and industrial opportunity that is in front of us, as a country.

Unfortunately, the SNP is, so far, doubling down on its long-standing opposition to nuclear energy. From the discussion today, it strikes me that that case is somewhat retrofitted in opposition to the current reality. What began many decades ago, because of a perceived relationship to nuclear military power and the role of the British state that the SNP contested, has morphed as that link became less credible.

I contrast that approach with that scion of environmentalism, James Lovelock, and with the campaigning journalist George Monbiot, who, when the facts changed, changed their minds. The facts changed because of the evidence that was gathered on the urgency of addressing climate change. That is why they converted to believing that nuclear power is the right thing to do.

In his first speech, Patrick Harvie set out a picture of a distributed system with reduced demand. That might be a laudable aspiration but, unfortunately, it bears no resemblance to the reality of the situation that is in front of us. Instead, we have a Government with no energy strategy and no plan to deliver an effective transition. It also does not deal at all with the predicted vast increase in electricity demand across the UK and Scotland.

All the facts tell us that a sustainable energy mix must be delivered. Too often, ministers of the Government have been caught out using statistics to claim effective energy independence, and have had to correct the record after the event, given the very welcome growth in renewable sources.

However, the reality is that an interconnected UK and European energy market relies on consumption markets, bill subsidies and

Government price guarantees on a huge scale. It also relies on a base-load that is predictable; we have heard a lot about base-load today. At the heart of our base-load in Scotland is nuclear energy—it is a key part of our energy mix.

The SNP Government has been very happy, time and again over its 18 years in government, to extend the lifespan of existing nuclear power sites. If the same sites are used, if safety standards are maintained—the Government must be satisfied about that if we are to continue them—and if the technology continues to improve, why turn our faces against an energy source that is so integral to the mix?

**Gillian Martin rose—**

**Michael Marra:** I would like to continue for the moment.

We would also be turning our backs on the jobs and the wages from domestic generation. I am thinking of John McGlinchey from Dundee, who goes to Tannadice on Saturday, the Hawkhill Tavern on Sunday, then gets the train on Monday to go to England to work as a highly skilled welder in nuclear power stations. Times that by thousands. Wages and economic activity are lost to Scotland, while we are all set to import nuclear energy for decades to come, as Paul Sweeney so ably set out.

Martin Whitfield paid great tribute to the workers in East Lothian at Torness, who have made a substantial contribution to our economy. The question has been asked, “Where would those nuclear power stations be?” Frankly, I know that Torness is keen to have one.

In contrast, nobody sensible is dismissing the renewable future potential, which brings me to Douglas Lumsden, and the Conservatives’ increasing rejection of reality. The plans that Mr Lumsden now vocally opposes were laid out by the Conservative Government, as Michael Matheson set out in a very fine speech.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Will the member give way?

**Michael Marra:** I will not, at the moment.

What Mr Matheson neglected to say, however, was that that was done in partnership with the SNP Government. Those plans are the cornerstone of what stands for an industrial policy from the SNP Government. On both sides, those parties need the political bravery to defend their record or to defend the projects as they stand at the moment.

**Gillian Martin:** Does Mr Marra not recognise that the Conservatives in this chamber have historically had an objection to mandating community benefits and the types of consultation that the new UK Government and the Scottish

Government are now doing to improve the system? The Conservatives denied that: the Conservatives did not want it.

**Michael Marra:** That is a very fair point, but I reiterate that it is incumbent on the cabinet secretary's Government to stand behind those projects more fully, because the infrastructure projects that are being set out are controversial. Mr Matheson talked very clearly about that. The case for infrastructure will be won only through economic benefit. It has been pointed out that money for scout huts is not sufficient—there have to be jobs for the next generation.

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

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

Frankly, the failure to grow the supply chain in Scotland results from planning delays. As Sarah Boyack pointed out, the Berwick Bank project has been on ministers' desks for two years.

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

**Michael Marra:** No thank you, sir. If I can continue—

**Stephen Kerr:** You mentioned his name.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Mr Kerr.

**Michael Marra:** A ScotWind auction generated fees in 2022, which were in the budgets in 2022-23 and 2023-24. Those fees were raided to plug the gaps in an incompetent emergency budget and, the following year, were used as a second reserve. Nothing was ever done to invest the money in employment. This very morning, the Minister for Public Finance was unable to tell the Finance and Public Administration Committee what the projected £350 million of funds for this year will actually be spent on. That is very far from being shovel ready.

For the first time in 14 years, we have a UK Government that is facing up to the climate crisis and taking meaningful action to address it through clean power by 2030, the creation of GB Energy and consenting reforms to speed up renewables projects. Last month, the Prime Minister announced plans for a historic expansion in nuclear power, which will enable small modular reactors to be built at sites across England and Wales. With UK electricity consumption set to double by 2040, the UK Labour Government is facing up to reality and planning for the future.

In recent days, Ed Miliband has written to Anas Sarwar, saying:

"in the event Scotland changed its policy on new nuclear, we"—

that is, the UK Government—

"would seek to work with the Scottish Government to make new nuclear happen with all the benefits for low carbon generation and jobs that it could provide."

That is the opportunity that could be seized, and that is the new direction that Scotland needs.

17:13

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):**

I welcome the opportunity to debate renewables. I will focus my remarks on how we deliver our low-carbon future, what it means for households and the effect that it will have on their bills, but I will start with a broader point about nuclear energy.

I find the nuclear power section of the motion slightly bizarre and lacking an evidence-based approach. Sarah Boyack described it as "negative" and "a retrograde motion". She also made the case for a robust mix of low-carbon energy that serves us well in all conditions. I associate myself with those remarks.

Let us be clear that nuclear power is a low-carbon energy source. According to the United Nations, it has the lowest carbon footprint of any energy source, when we factor in construction and decommissioning. By all means, let us ensure that wind, solar, hydro and other renewables are the driving force in the energy transition. I would echo Gillian Martin's comments regarding Scotland's potential in that area.

I would like to point out to you, Presiding Officer, that it is indeed fake news to say that I or the Scottish Conservatives are against community benefit. In fact, in 2017, I announced a policy to expand community benefit.

**Gillian Martin:** It is possible that I did not make myself entirely clear. I was not saying that the Scottish Conservatives are against community benefits; I was saying that I had asked the previous UK Government to explore mandating community benefits and engagement, but was told no.

**Maurice Golden:** I have not been in government, and I am not responsible or accountable for anyone who has been in government. Therefore, there is no point in Gillian Martin saying, "Somebody over there said something", referencing people in the chamber. We can be responsible only for what we ourselves say and do, and it is fake news to suggest otherwise.

I agree with some of Patrick Harvie's points. He said that we waste too much energy and that energy efficiency in our buildings must be improved, which I agree with.

Alex Cole-Hamilton made the point that Scotland should be leading the world in clean energy. He has a vision of Scotland as a renewables powerhouse, and I associate myself with his remarks.

We also need energy sources that are capable of generating energy 24/7 in order to maintain grid stability and avoid brown or black starts. We have already seen that a reliance on foreign gas imports can lead to huge energy bill spikes, not to mention its having implications for energy security. Building over capacity brings extra balancing, storage and transmission costs, which are all measures that risk increasing the price that people pay for their energy.

**Fergus Ewing:** Given that the Conservatives accept that, even if the new SMRs are capable of working—many members argue that that is not the case—it would take seven years to build them, according to Stephen Kerr, and perhaps three years to build a gas power station, and 85 per cent of the 30 million homes in Britain are fuelled by gas, should we not go for gas rather than nuclear? Would that not provide the backup and base-load that are required?

**Maurice Golden:** Fergus Ewing has made a valid point. In the long term, we have to transition away from carbon-based fuels, however, which includes gas.

On transmission infrastructure, Douglas Lumsden highlighted the case that has been made by communities who are asking to be listened to by the Scottish Government. As well as being set out in the Nolan principles, that is also a requirement under the Aarhus convention of 1998. However, as Graham Simpson pointed out, there can be no transition without transmission, so a balance has to be struck.

We know that the SNP has a long-standing policy of arguing for Scottish households to pay more for their energy bills. For example, it has called for standing charges to be scrapped, but those charges help to pay for network costs. If we scrap them, higher unit costs would almost certainly make up the shortfall. In other words, those who use the most energy, such as households in rural areas such as the north of Scotland and those who rely on medical equipment, would pay more, although second-home owners would benefit significantly.

The SNP position for a floor approach to the forward-looking transmission demand residual charge would, according to the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, increase current charges, particularly for customers in the north of Scotland. Although many members have mentioned transmission network use of system charges, which is the current transmission charging regime,

everyone should note that, although Scottish generators pay more, Scottish consumers pay less. If anyone is arguing for generators to pay less, the quid pro quo is that consumers in Scotland will pay more.

I have concerns about Ofgem's decision to back the zonal pricing model. Although it is theoretically sound, splitting the country up into different pricing zones risks investment by creating unstable market conditions. We have to create a friendly environment for business, innovation and investment, which this Government struggles to cope with doing, whether it be around anaerobic digestion or heat-pump installations—which, unfortunately, I do not have enough time to go into.

**Stephen Kerr:** Will the member give way?

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Golden is concluding.

**Maurice Golden:** If we are to make progress on a just transition as a whole, the SNP needs to step up. Speaking for me and my colleagues in the chamber, I can assure the Scottish Government that we will be there to support it in that regard.

17:20

**The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan):** I thank members for, in many cases, their insightful contributions to this important debate. However, among the advocates of nuclear power, there was a notable shyness about volunteering communities in their own constituencies that would host not only—

**Edward Mountain:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Martin Whitfield:** Will the minister give way?

**Alasdair Allan:** I ask members to let me finish.

Those communities would have to host not only nuclear power stations but nuclear waste repositories—members were even shy about that issue.

I mention that because the debate, which is timely, gives us the opportunity to talk about the significant changes in global and UK energy markets, as well as UK-wide policy developments and court decisions that have had a direct impact on Scotland's energy sector. All those issues bring a renewed focus on the importance of renewable energy generation, our progress towards net zero and Scotland's future energy sector, as many members have mentioned.

I will not be able to do justice to the many members who made contributions, but there were at least some points of consensus. For instance, Alex Cole-Hamilton pointed out the need to speed

up the pace of grid connections in order to obviate constraint payments and allow renewables to flourish, and Audrey Nicoll mentioned the need for transmission charge reform.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Does the Scottish Government have a view on zonal pricing? Is it in favour of that?

**Alasdair Allan:** Zonal pricing has to be done in a way that is right and fair. It was interesting that some of the contributions towards the end of the debate acknowledged the unfair nature of the status quo when it comes to transmission charges and many related issues, and we are having that conversation with the UK Government.

If I heard him rightly—forgive me if I did not—Paul Sweeney asked a question about small modular reactors at Grangemouth. I understand that, in 2022, Ineos confirmed that such reactors did not form part of its net zero road map for Grangemouth.

As I said, I cannot refer to everyone who spoke in the debate. However, as the cabinet secretary made clear, the Scottish Government unapologetically rejects new nuclear power plants in Scotland because of the risks and costs related to their development—

**Stephen Kerr:** You are anti-science.

**Paul Sweeney:** Will the minister give way?

**Alasdair Allan:** I am not anti-science, but I will give way to someone sensible.

**Paul Sweeney:** Is not the point that the minister has just made precisely why Ineos decided not to invest in SMR development at Grangemouth and, similarly, why Rolls-Royce ruled out Scotland as a location for the heavy-pressure vessel manufacturing facility that it had planned for SMRs?

**Alasdair Allan:** Perhaps Mr Sweeney knows more about the reasons than I do, but my understanding is that Rolls-Royce ruled out similar developments at Grangemouth.

The carbon neutrality or otherwise of nuclear power generation has been alluded to a number of times. I accept that nuclear power generation is not a carbon-intensive process, but it creates toxic and life-threatening waste. At one point in the debate, rather charmingly, the waste was compared with dishwasher tablets, but it is a little more toxic than that.

**Martin Whitfield:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Alasdair Allan:** No, thank you.

The toxic and life-threatening waste that is created requires complex and robust management

to ensure the protection of people and the environment. That—coupled with the enduring risk of nuclear accidents, as recent history shows—means that we cannot simply ignore the dangers of producing and managing hazardous radioactive waste products.

The Scottish Government also remains unconvinced of the economic argument for new nuclear. In 2015, the International Energy Agency published research that suggested that new nuclear power in the UK would be more expensive than it would be in any other country, yet the UK Government has continued to commit huge sums of public money to nuclear energy. As we have heard, when accounting for inflation, Hinkley Point C is over budget by £28 billion, and it is running at least six years late. Just to put that into some kind of perspective, £28 billion is equivalent to Scotland's entire health budget for the year, and then half as much as that again.

Despite those delays and cost overruns, the UK Government and its allies in quarters of this chamber continue to stake taxpayer money on that nuclear gamble. To be absolutely clear, it is the Scottish Government's view that the UK Government should instead focus on increasing the deployment of renewables.

At the beginning of the debate, the cabinet secretary set out—

**Finlay Carson:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Alasdair Allan:** I will.

**Finlay Carson:** I appreciate the minister giving way. He says that his focus is on renewables, but we have no idea how much renewables generation rural Scotland is supposed to take on. Galloway is already over capacity for wind turbines and there is no clear indication of when it will stop. We have a local authority that is inundated with applications for wind farms, upgraded power lines, biodiversity and ecosystems services and solar, and the Government is overturning the views of local people and the independent reporters. Will you agree to a moratorium in Dumfries and Galloway until the Government gets its act together and tells us what its plans for renewable energy are?

**The Presiding Officer:** Always speak through the chair, please, Mr Carson.

**Alasdair Allan:** I cannot agree with a lot of what the member has just said, but I can agree with him on the importance of making sure that we bring communities with us and on the issue of having targets around the growth of renewables in Scotland and the role that a range of technologies are playing in our journey to net zero.

The renewable energy generated in 2023 was equivalent to what would be needed to power all households in Scotland for five and a half years. Under this Government, 70 per cent of the electricity that was generated in Scotland in 2023 was from renewable sources, which is a marked increase on 32 per cent in 2013.

**Patrick Harvie:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Alasdair Allan:** I must make progress—time is running out, I am afraid.

Those figures illustrate that our policy position of no to nuclear and yes to renewables is bearing fruit and delivering clean energy for Scotland.

The findings of a Fraser of Allander Institute report that was published in December 2023 show a thriving renewable energy sector in Scotland that generated in excess of £10 billion of output in 2021 and supports more than 42,000 jobs. Further independent analysis from Ernst & Young shows that low-carbon and renewable energy could support almost 80,000 jobs in Scotland by 2050. Those reports highlight that we are seizing the economic opportunities of the energy transition.

As I said to Finlay Carson, we need to bring people with us, and we are alive to that. That point was also made by Emma Harper and Fergus Ewing in different ways at different points in the debate. However, as we have heard, in the past 12 months, more than £30 million of benefits have been offered to Scottish communities. We will continue to work with the renewables sector and the UK Government to ensure that communities feel the maximum benefit from the transition.

**Patrick Harvie:** Will the minister give way?

**The Presiding Officer:** The minister must conclude.

**Alasdair Allan:** I am afraid that I am going to have to close.

We know that Scotland needs to deliver cleaner, greener energy, not new nuclear. The deployment of renewables provides Scotland with the best pathway to net zero by 2045, creating a climate-friendly energy system that delivers affordable, resilient and clean energy supplies for communities, businesses and consumers.

**Douglas Lumsden:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In today's debate, the minister said once again that Scottish ministers could not meet campaign groups because that would be a breach of the ministerial code. Chapter 5 of the ministerial code lays out that ministers can have such meetings but not pass comment or give a personal view. Also, if they are meeting one side, they should meet both sides. Has there been any

approach to change the *Official Report* to show that ministers can meet campaign groups?

**The Presiding Officer:** The ministerial code is not a matter for me, and therefore not a matter on which I will be ruling from the chair.

## Parliamentary Bureau Motion

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

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-16685, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument. I ask Jamie Hepburn to move the motion on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

#### *Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Support (Improvement) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

17:30

### **Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests, which notes that I am a farmer.

Tonight, we are being asked to support an SSI on the new whole-farm plan, which contains a new condition that farmers and crofters across the country will have to comply with in order to receive basic agricultural support. Those who apply for support this year will need to complete two of five new plans: an animal health and welfare plan, a biodiversity audit, an integrated pest management plan, a carbon audit and a soil analysis.

My colleagues and I will support the SSI today. However, to suggest that we fully support it would be far from accurate. We do not want to hold up vital payments to farmers, but I want to be open with the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity and say that we walk very, very tepidly with him. If he read the room correctly during the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee's session on the topic, he will know that there are real concerns across the Parliament about the process of agricultural policy change.

I have two key fears. The first is that the rural support plan—a key document that sets the overall vision and strategy for agricultural support—is not due to be placed before the Parliament until after a series of pieces of secondary legislation have implemented various new policies. I am aware that stakeholders outside Parliament are deeply worried about that.

Equally, there is concern that the SSI, along with a previous SSI on the Scottish suckler beef support scheme and future secondary legislation, will not treat smaller farmers and crofters fairly and that they will be disadvantaged by the changes. The industry wanted to see less bureaucracy, not more, and I remain concerned that the plans not only will be detrimental to some parts of our industry but will not actually achieve any outcomes. I realise that the Scottish Government seems to like doing this, but, if we put legislation

through when we do not have key information, we put it through in a vacuum. That undermines Parliament's ability to provide fair scrutiny and risks damage to our incredible agricultural community.

Our farmers and crofters produce great-quality food and drink, and we lead the world on animal health and welfare. The industry is desperately seeking new methods to increase biodiversity, reduce climate impacts and make sure that we all have wholesome food on our tables. There is more to do, but the Government must work with and for the industry. That includes recognising the worrying reduction in livestock numbers and helping to support production so that the whole supply chain, which brings with it thousands of jobs in Scotland, can prosper.

As always, the Scottish Conservatives give our full and unwavering support to our agricultural community on farm and in the wider supply chain, but, unless more answers are given in respect of future agricultural policy, we may not be so willing to vote with the minister the next time.

17:32

### **The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity**

**(Jim Fairlie):** The regulations seek to introduce the foundations of the whole-farm plan approach as a condition of the basic payment scheme. I make it clear that this is about ensuring that our farmers and crofters have the information that they need to be more productive and more profitable. The approach will baseline their current practices, allowing them to progress and to measure their progress.

We had an extremely interesting meeting today with John Gilliland, who states:

"If you can't measure, you can't manage it."

What we are doing will highlight the good practices that are already being undertaken to help people to identify where they could become more efficient, cut emissions and increase biodiversity while continuing to produce the high-quality food that we all want them to produce.

In 2025, we are asking that two of the following plans and audits be undertaken: an animal health and welfare plan, a nature report, a carbon report, an integrated pest management plan and a soil report. Businesses are free to select which two they undertake, based on their situation, and two of the requirements already have equivalents—an example is the animal welfare plan from Quality Meat Scotland. We have been asked about that regularly.

I make it clear that the whole-farm plan approach was developed with the industry. We have worked with farmers, crofters, agricultural

stakeholders, skills delivery partners and our environmental partners to develop the new conditionality. I note the recent response from the Scottish Crofting Federation. Let me be clear that crofting is a vital part of our rural economy culturally, economically and socially. That is why my officials and I have worked, and continue to work, with the crofting community to ensure that the proposals meet their needs, and it is why I have instructed my officials to write to the chief executive of the Scottish Crofting Federation, asking her to meet me to discuss the best way forward.

The regulations have been drafted to come into force on 5 March 2025 so that farmers and crofters can set out in their single application forms which two plans they have chosen this year. The SAF window opens on 15 March and is expected to close on 15 May.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Given that we are looking at the SSI today, does the minister agree that the co-design of the policies is not working? At this late stage, we are still hearing real concerns from our crofters and smaller farmers.

**Jim Fairlie:** No. As I said to Mr Carson in a meeting of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, I do not agree with that, because we have co-designed with the crofting community and the rest of the farming community. They were part of the steering group that delivered the SSI that we are considering today.

The SSI marks a significant point in our progress towards becoming a world leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture, and it is right that we must expect more from those who are in receipt of public funds and support on the journey. A failure to bring the regulations into force would risk undermining that progress and the efforts and work of many of our farmers and crofters, who are already undertaking the improvements that we are asking for.

I reassure members that we are committed to continuing to support our farmers and crofters so that they continue to deliver for sustainable food production, nature and climate—and to ensure our thriving rural communities.

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

## Decision Time

17:36

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Douglas Lumsden is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sarah Boyack will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-16657.3, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16657, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scotland's renewable future, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

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

17:36

*Meeting suspended.*

17:39

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to the vote on amendment S6M-16657.3, in the name of Douglas Lumsden.

Members should cast their votes now.

### For

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

**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)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-16657.3, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, is: For 29, Against 89, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-16657.2, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16657, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scotland's renewable future, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is closed.

**Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Matheson. We will make sure that that is recorded.

**For**

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, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)



Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

#### 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)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 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-16657.2, in the name of Sarah Boyack, is: For 46, Against 72, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-16657.1, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16657, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scotland's renewable future, 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)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

#### Abstentions

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)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)

Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-16657.1, in the name of Patrick Harvie, is: For 11, Against 33, Abstentions 75.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-16657, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scotland's renewable future, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is closed.

I call Gordon MacDonald for a point of order.

Please wait a moment, Mr MacDonald, while we try to get your microphone on. Perhaps you could use another member's microphone.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** Come on; coorie in. [*Laughter.*]

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** Thanks, George.

On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

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

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

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

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-16657, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scotland's renewable future, is: For 69, Against 50, Abstentions 0.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament rejects the creation of new nuclear power plants in Scotland and the risk that they bring; believes that Scotland's future is as a renewables powerhouse; further believes that the expansion of renewables should have a positive impact on household energy bills; notes the challenges and dangers of producing and managing hazardous radioactive nuclear waste products, and the potentially catastrophic consequences of the failure of a nuclear power plant; recognises that the development and operation of renewable power generation is faster, cheaper and safer than that of nuclear power, and welcomes that renewables would deliver higher employment than nuclear power for the development and production of equivalent levels of generated power.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-16685, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Support (Improvement) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

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

**Alcohol-related Brain Damage**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-16291, in the name of Carol Mochan, on a holistic approach to alcohol-related brain damage. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I invite Carol Mochan to open the debate.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes what it sees as the concerning and under-recognised issue of alcohol-related brain damage (ARBD) in the South Scotland region and across the country; believes that there are significant permanent physical, psychological and social consequences of the condition, including decreased cognitive functioning, mental health problems and harm to quality of life; notes the view that there is a need to adopt a more holistic multidisciplinary approach, integrating healthcare, social services, public health and addiction teams for people with alcohol dependence; further notes the belief in working collaboratively to prioritise the recognition, prevention and treatment of ARBD, ensuring healthcare professionals are adequately trained to identify and manage the condition, with adequate resources provided to ensure early diagnosis and treatment, and recognises the calls for public health campaigns to raise awareness and remove stigma.

17:49

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank members for supporting my motion and for the cross-party support that has allowed me to bring this important subject to the chamber. I pre-emptively thank members who will contribute to the debate; I am sure that many of them will have local stories to tell that relate to this desperately complex, life-changing and stigmatised condition. It is important that those experiences are given a platform.

I welcome guests to the public gallery: Grant Brand, who is a social work lead for ARBD in Glasgow; and, from Ayrshire, Dr Ben Chetcuti and Leanne MacPherson. Both are healthcare professionals who have been instrumental in sparking my interest in this area and helping me to understand the real and significant need to raise the profile of the condition and understand the treatment requirements for it.

Alcohol-related brain damage, which is often shortened to ARBD, is a subject that does not receive the attention that it deserves. Although the subject is mentioned in the chamber on occasion, it is right that we have time tonight to debate it properly. Those who are listening to or watching the debate at home may not entirely understand what ARBD is, so I will briefly explain it.

ARBD is a condition in which there are changes to the structure and function of the brain as a result of long-term heavy alcohol use. Alcohol especially damages the frontal lobes of the brain—the brain's control centre—and symptoms therefore include struggling to plan, make decisions and assess risk. In addition, people might have difficulty in concentrating and finding motivation to do things, even daily tasks such as eating. People can also have difficulties in controlling impulses and managing emotions, and ARBD often results in changes in personality.

It is likely that many people who are suffering from ARBD are not diagnosed. One symptom of ARBD is a lack of insight into the problems that it causes, which means that many patients do not recognise that there is anything wrong and do not seek medical help. In addition, importantly, there is a lack of understanding among clinicians. The numerous forms and presentations of the condition mean that, in order to make a diagnosis, clinicians need to be aware of the variations of ARBD. It can be difficult to distinguish between the long-term effects of alcohol on the brain and the short-term effects of intoxication or withdrawal. From my discussions with clinicians who are interested in this field, I am aware that the lack of expertise in, for example, general practice, accident and emergency departments and general wards can result in opportunities for diagnosis and treatment being missed.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I am grateful to Carol Mochan for taking an intervention, and I compliment her on bringing the debate to the chamber. One of the interesting factors regarding ARBD is the complexity in its presentation. Would she agree, however, that it seems to be particularly prevalent in adults aged between about 40 and 55, which means that there is an identifiable group, and training could be given to look out for the condition among those of that age?

**Carol Mochan:** I thank the member for the intervention—I absolutely agree, and I know from my discussions with clinicians that age is a very important factor regarding ARBD, as younger people are presenting and diagnosis can be missed.

It is thought that ARBD is present in 1.5 per cent of the general population and among almost 30 per cent of alcohol-dependent individuals. The average age of those who are referred to specialist ARBD services is 55, but there are—shockingly—some reports of individuals as young as 30, and even in their 20s, being diagnosed.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** My friend is making an excellent speech. Does she share my admiration for the work that is done by organisations such as Penumbra, which has a

centre for ARBD in Possilpark in my area, and does she note the significance of social inequality in the incidence of ARBD? Substance use and misuse can often be a factor in self-medicating for bigger traumas, and in particular poverty-related traumas.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you the time back for the interventions, Ms Mochan.

**Carol Mochan:** I thank Paul Sweeney for his intervention; I absolutely will come on to that point. Those services are important and we should build on them, and the social deprivation element must be part of our discussions.

I think that we can all agree that people of a young age in particular are at a point in their life where they should have positive years ahead. Even when people are 55, that should be a time for them to be excited about the next stage in life, but the condition can make the basics of life intolerable. Dr Chetcuti explained to me that he believes that, sadly, the lack of services for those patients means that many people live a life of poor quality or lose their life far sooner than they should.

The reasons that people end up with the condition are complex but, essentially, ARBD is caused by a person regularly drinking or binge drinking much more alcohol than the recommended limits, which, over time, can, if untreated, cause irreparable damage to the brain.

The brain damage is often caused by a lack of thiamine, also known as vitamin B1, which the brain requires in order to work properly. Absorption of thiamine while drinking alcohol to excess is one cause, but we know that those with serious dependency often have chaotic lifestyles, and that can result in poor dietary intake, which exacerbates the lack of thiamine.

It was reporting on the use of thiamine in treatment that made me realise how important it was to raise awareness of the condition and argue for better services. That treatment should be achievable, but people need knowledgeable clinicians and specialist services to support them. There is evidence that if excessive alcohol consumption is stopped and thiamine intake is increased, around 25 per cent of people can make a full recovery and 50 per cent of people can make a partial recovery. However, the reality is that, as a result of a lack of services to raise the profile of ARBD and its treatment, those opportunities are being missed. That is an important point.

As my friend Martin Whitfield said, it is often younger people who are affected, and they can experience poor quality of life. Care home beds for them are very expensive, and that poor quality of life continues because, once someone is admitted, it is difficult to get the expertise to support them

and get them home. The evidence shows that we can change that, and it is important that we talk about that in Parliament.

I know that time is tight, Deputy Presiding Officer, but we cannot have a debate on the subject without mentioning the root causes of alcohol misuse, the link to poverty and deprivation and the role of Government in policy development. I acknowledge the Government's role—as the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health will know—in progressing minimum unit pricing. However, I hope that the minister might, in her closing remarks, respond with regard to future movement on the introduction of evidence-based population-wide measures around availability and marketing of alcohol products. With those measures, we would see population-level changes in alcohol intake, resulting in a change to the drinking norms in Scottish society. That is the reality.

In my final minutes—I promise, Deputy Presiding Officer—I return to services for people who are currently suffering from ARBD. The reality is that services are at risk of diminishing rather than expanding. I believe—as I hope that I have shown tonight—that we need to take the subject seriously. I hope that the debate is merely the start of a conversation in the Scottish Parliament. What high-quality service provision currently exists for those who are suffering from ARBD, and how does the Government ensure that funding for those services continues and that there is funding to open other services in Scotland?

We must talk about national treatment standards and how we ensure that there is a referral pathway for the condition to the services that provide care.

I will stop there, Deputy Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Mochan. We move to the open debate.

17:58

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I am pleased to speak in this important debate, and I thank Carol Mochan for bringing it to the chamber and for her informative speech.

Scotland has had a difficult relationship with alcohol over the years. The majority of us, thankfully, can enjoy alcohol without it elevating into addiction. However, it is important for everyone to understand that alcohol-related brain damage occurs in around 35 per cent of those who succumb to the illness of addiction. It happens as a result of long-term heavy drinking and accounts for between 10 and 24 per cent of all cases of dementia.

The Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems partnership has produced critical evidence of which we should all take heed. Most people with ARBD are in their 50s and 60s, but—as we have heard—more and more people in their 30s and 40s are being seen with symptoms, and that is incredibly worrying. Typically, women develop ARBD at a younger age than men do, and women are more vulnerable than men to ARBD after drinking heavily for a shorter length of time. That fact surely must correlate with a higher incidence of fetal alcohol disease, which is entirely preventable by abstaining from alcohol while pregnant.

As convener of the cross-party group on women, families and justice, I find the effect of alcohol on women really concerning. It is estimated that as many as 90 per cent of women in custody in Scotland have addiction problems, whether that involves alcohol or drugs. It is further estimated that 80 per cent of women in prison have brain damage due to head injuries that are caused by domestic violence, and a similar number of women suffer mental illness to some degree. The case for holistic prevention and recovery for all those who are affected by alcohol, and women in particular, could not be more stark.

Symptoms of ARBD include difficulties in making decisions and assessing risk; difficulties with concentration and motivation; impulse and emotional control problems; and changes in personality. In effect, it damages the brain's control centre, which makes even daily tasks difficult or impossible.

Ironically, many people who are suffering from ARBD are not diagnosed. One symptom of ARBD is a lack of insight into the problems that it causes, so many patients do not recognise that there is anything wrong and do not seek medical help. There is also significant stigma surrounding the condition, which must be removed.

Worryingly, there is also a lack of understanding among clinicians. The numerous forms and presentations of the condition mean that, in order to make a diagnosis, clinicians need to be aware of the variations of ARBD. It can be difficult to distinguish between the long-term effects of alcohol on the brain and the short-term effects of intoxication or withdrawal, so awareness of the differences is key.

The good news among the gloom is that ARBD is not progressive, as dementia is. The brain can heal, people can recover and the damage can be reversed. Doctors are able to prescribe medication that can help to alleviate withdrawal symptoms. Figures show that if excessive alcohol consumption is stopped and vitamin B1 intake is increased, 25 per cent of people can make a full recovery and 50 per cent of people make a partial

recovery; sadly, 25 per cent do not recover and have to be cared for long term. Recovery services are key and everyone should have access to specialist care. SHAAP advocates for the expansion of alcohol brief interventions and for continued support for the managed alcohol programmes pilot in Glasgow.

In conclusion, I believe that it is time to rethink how we deal with the public health issue of addiction. We need to remove stigma and reframe recovery in a holistic and compassionate way. That is, I believe, the only way forward.

18:02

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** I, too, thank Carol Mochan for bringing the debate to the chamber. Alcohol-related brain damage is a serious issue, and one that is perhaps not as widely recognised as it should be. Carol Mochan clearly outlined the symptoms and how they directly impact those with ARBD, and referred to the role of diet and vitamin B1, or thiamine.

In 2023, 1,277 people tragically lost their lives to alcohol. That is a 15-year high, and it is quite shocking. That is 1,277 people who have lived with years of poor health and who have left behind families and friends; the effects are felt by so many. The number of people accessing alcohol services is now 40 per cent lower than it was a decade ago. When people do access those services, they are much older and, as a result, have increasingly complex problems. Again, Carol Mochan spoke about the lack of expertise and specialists in this clinical field. In Edinburgh, however, we are fortunate in having a specialist ARBD service.

I have raised issues surrounding ARBD in the chamber several times, and I have written to the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, Jenni Minto, specifically regarding issues with the NHS Lothian alcohol-related brain damage unit in Edinburgh. In September, I questioned the Scottish Government about its response to

"Dr Stephen Smith's evaluation of the alcohol-related brain damage residential rehabilitation service in Edinburgh".

The minister replied to say that the SNP Government was "reviewing the evaluation".

Earlier, in an intervention, Paul Sweeney mentioned the Penumbra service in the west of Scotland. The ARBD unit that is run by Penumbra at Milestone house in Edinburgh saves lives, yet it is facing the withdrawal of funding. Given that the service reduces the number of hospital bed days in NHS Lothian by nearly 2,000 a year, it is clear that there would be a very negative impact if the service was to close.

I know that decisions on funding and service provision are made at a local level by NHS Lothian but, in responding further to my question, the minister said that the Scottish Government was

"working with members of our expert residential rehabilitation development working group to assess whether the ARBD unit meets the"

correct definition of what counts as "residential rehabilitation", and stated that it would

"provide an update ... in due course".—[*Official Report*, 11 September 2025; c 13-14.]

In October, I raised the issue in the chamber once again, after the decision to close the ARBD unit in Edinburgh was paused while options were being assessed. However, there is no other ARBD-specific residential rehab unit in Scotland, and evidence shows that treatment for people with ARBD in non-specialist units is often unsatisfactory.

I am still waiting for an update from the Scottish Government on whether that vital life-saving unit in Edinburgh will remain open. It is disappointing that the issue has dragged on for so long without any further updates.

Given the pressures that our services are under—in particular, the blocked beds and delayed discharges in acute hospital settings—I hope that the Scottish Government will provide the clarity and support that are needed to keep the ARBD unit in Edinburgh open.

18:05

**Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** I join members in congratulating my friend Carol Mochan on bringing this issue to the chamber.

Members are well aware of the horrific consequences of addiction and the national shame of drug and alcohol deaths. Alcohol-related brain damage, or ARBD, is caused by long-term heavy drinking. It can damage the frontal lobe and cause symptoms similar to dementia, such as someone struggling to make decisions, having poor impulse control or experiencing personality change.

Those with ARBD often do not know that they have the condition, or are dismissed as "problem drinkers." As with so many other issues, it is people who live in the most deprived areas, some of which fall in my region, who are most at risk.

Many people with ARBD have complex cases with multiple issues, including addiction to other drugs, poor mental health, and social isolation. Approaches that take that into account should be supported.

In 2024, I met with the North Edinburgh Drug and Alcohol Centre, where I was told about its

holistic approach, which focuses on long-term positive outcomes for people with complex needs, including ARBD. With flexible care and harm reduction practices, and by building relationships, it has been able to improve outcomes for people with long-term alcohol and drug addictions and save public money in the long term. One client who required over £26,000-worth of services in the three months prior to her referral, such as police call-outs or A and E visits, needed only £3,000-worth of services in the following months with support from NEDAC.

The NHS Lothian Penumbra Milestone service, which specifically treats ARBD, also uses a multidisciplinary approach, with six different elements to recovery including social health and addiction. It has seen great success in recovery and cognition and has produced a significant saving to the NHS with 2,000 fewer hospital bed days.

However, despite clear positive outcomes, Penumbra Milestone is in the dark about its future funding, and the North Edinburgh Drug and Alcohol Centre has lost funding in recent years. Those services provide proven preventative care. Underfunding them not only worsens outcomes for people with ARBD or addiction; it costs the national health service more in the long term.

The consequences of addiction for those who are suffering and their families are terrible. However, when discussing alcohol-related brain damage, it is key to remember that some recovery is possible. We know that the approach that is taken by services such as Penumbra Milestone and the North Edinburgh Drug and Alcohol Centre can deliver results in the long term and save public money while doing so. For that to happen, they need to have funding and support.

18:09

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** I thank Carol Mochan for bringing this important topic to the chamber for debate, as well as Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems and all the people on the front line for their tireless work in this area.

We know that Scotland has long struggled with alcohol-related harms to the great detriment of our collective wellbeing, and we must not ignore the harmful impact on individuals and their families and on our society. One of the most insidious yet rarely acknowledged or understood consequences of prolonged problematic alcohol use is the damage that it can do to the brain. Some of the most harrowing cases that I encountered when I worked in the area of homelessness involved the people who were affected by that condition. Most of them were in their 40s and 50s, but the

youngest person was 20, and what I witnessed trying to support him lives with me 20 years down the line.

Alcohol-related brain damage is a hidden condition that services and folk alike are just not sufficiently aware of. As we have heard, it takes many forms, ranging from cognitive impairments to memory loss and difficulties with decision making and emotional regulation. It affects not just the individual but their loved ones. It can be a significant barrier to not only accessing and maintaining recovery but accessing many other services that people depend on. Despite that, too many people go undiagnosed and untreated, and they are left to struggle on their own.

Urgent action is needed. We must develop national treatment standards and a strategy that ensures that ARBD is identified early and treated comprehensively, and that support is available to those who need it most. This is not just about healthcare; it is about creating a society where no one is left behind, where individuals suffering from ARBD receive the care and support that allows them to rebuild their lives.

First, we need to raise awareness across the healthcare sector. Many healthcare professionals, including GPs, emergency workers and even those working directly with alcohol and drug partnerships are not equipped with the tools to identify alcohol-related brain damage at an early stage. Training for front-line staff must be a priority so that they can recognise the signs of ARBD, refer individuals for appropriate diagnosis and ensure that they are provided with the right support. As we have heard, there can be a partial recovery and a reversal of symptoms. Everybody should be offered the opportunity to realise that recovery if that is possible.

Secondly, we must ensure that diagnosis is not a drawn-out process. Delays in diagnosis can lead to worsening symptoms and, ultimately, to irreversible damage. We need a streamlined pathway for diagnosing ARBD and providing timely intervention. The earlier the intervention, the better the chance of improving quality of life and recovery. That intervention needs to be holistic—physical, mental and social support should all be part of the care plan.

We must ensure that the intervention also includes provision of specialist rehab services. We have heard from members about how important that provision is. Whether specialist rehab services are provided by Penumbra or Simon Community Scotland and its managed alcohol programme, which is helpful in identifying people who have ARBD, we must ensure that they are supported and funded.



Moreover, we must take a whole-community approach. Problematic alcohol use is not an isolated issue—it is interconnected with poverty, trauma, adverse childhood experiences, housing insecurity, mental health challenges and social isolation. Treating ARBD without addressing the wider societal factors will not yield lasting results. It is essential that we work across sectors—health, housing, social services and justice—to provide a comprehensive solution to the problem.

Prevention needs to be a key strand of the work. We must focus on public health strategies to reduce harmful drinking before it leads to brain damage. Prevention must be integrated into our public health campaigns, schools and communities, because we cannot afford to wait for the damage to be done before we act. We heard from Carol Mochan about some of the best-buy deals that we know affect ARBD. We think about minimum unit pricing, but we must also think about availability and marketing.

Finally, we must ensure that people living with alcohol-related brain damage are not stigmatised. Too often, individuals with ARBD are misunderstood, blamed for their condition and excluded from society. That only deepens their isolation and makes it harder for them to access the help that they need. It is time to build a culture of understanding and empathy. We must see people for who they are—not just their condition—and offer them the dignity and respect that they deserve.

Scotland needs a strategy that identifies alcohol-related brain damage early, treats it comprehensively and supports those affected through every step of their recovery journey. We must take a collaborative approach, working across sectors and communities to tackle the issue in a way that reflects our values of fairness, compassion and respect for all. This is not just a healthcare issue—it is a social issue and a human issue. It is the challenge that we must meet with urgency, determination and care.

18:14

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)**  
**(Con):** I am pleased to contribute to the debate and thank Carol Mochan for bringing it to the chamber.

This is an important opportunity to highlight an issue that does not receive the attention that it deserves. As we know, alcohol-related brain damage can have a devastating impact on individuals and their families. Despite that, the condition is still not well understood and is sometimes missed by health professionals. Alcohol Change UK has highlighted that the condition can lead to the double stigma of brain

impairment and alcohol addiction, and the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland has said that alcohol-related brain damage often affects groups that are already marginalised in society. The motion is therefore right to speak about an holistic approach to tackling the issue. Part of the solution must be to challenge common perceptions about alcohol-related brain damage, and alcohol use disorder more generally. As the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland highlighted, there is often a perception that assessing and helping people with alcohol problems is a difficult and lengthy process.

Early detection is another important issue. As it stands, many cases of alcohol-related brain damage go undetected for years, with some clinicians misdiagnosing the condition as a mental health issue or dementia. Although improving awareness of the condition among clinicians is important, we have to be aware of the public's ability to recognise the signs and symptoms of alcohol-related brain damage in friends, family members or even themselves, so that there are opportunities for diagnosis.

As the condition can affect each individual differently, specialist care centres are often the best approach. In my region, there is the NHS Forth Valley substance use service in Stirling and Clackmannanshire and, in Fife, there is the alcohol and drug partnership. Those vital services support individuals and social care partnerships, but many of them are struggling. They do not have the funding and budgets that are required to offer support to individuals.

It is disappointing that alcohol-related brain damage does not receive the coverage or attention that it needs. I hope that the debate gives us an opportunity to address that issue. Failure to tackle the condition will put a significant burden on health and social care across the country, and I hope that the minister will talk about that when she sums up. We have heard this evening about some of the problems that individuals in Scotland are having accessing services. We need to ensure that those who are suffering are given a support mechanism. I join members in asking the Scottish Government to consider an evidence-based solution, because that is what we need.

Scotland's shocking history of drug deaths is a national shame and a national scandal. We cannot allow alcohol-related brain damage to go down the same route. We have heard tonight how many individuals have lost their lives because of the alcohol culture in our country. That has to stop, and the only way that it can stop is with an evidence-based solution across the country.

18:18

**The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto):** I, too, thank Carol Mochan for securing this debate on alcohol-related brain damage. I support her motion.

Like Elena Whitham, I thank everyone who supports people with ARBD. There is still a lot to do to improve lives and reduce harms caused by alcohol. ARBD can be underrecognised as a significant cause of physical, psychological and social impacts. I hope that members' contributions to the debate will help to raise awareness of the condition and the need for closer working between services.

The provision of the support that people who are affected by ARBD require is shared across healthcare, social care, mental health, primary care and alcohol treatment services, including rehabilitation. The person who is affected must be at the centre of the support pathway across services. I saw that in action when I recently attended the official opening of the Scottish Government-funded expansion to the Maxie Richards Foundation residential rehab in Tighnabruaich. Such services—members mentioned services in other areas—play a crucial role in supporting individuals to reduce harms before they reach the level of ARBD.

Our investment of up to £38 million to add residential rehab capacity is a marker of the actions that this Government is taking to reduce alcohol harms as part of our national mission. A number of members mentioned Penumbra in Edinburgh, on which I understand that a decision will be made imminently.

The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland published a guide on ARBD for professionals in 2019. It estimated that the condition impacts around 1.5 per cent of Scotland's population and 30 per cent of dependent drinkers. We also know that it disproportionately affects people in our less well-off communities. The guide notes that holistic support will help to improve prevention, detection and management.

I am pleased that the guide will be supplemented by the United Kingdom's first alcohol treatment guidance for clinicians, which the UK Government will publish soon. The guidance will cover ARBD-related clinical requirements in diagnosing and treating the condition, which Carol Mochan raised as an issue, and is being supported by a UK-wide expert group, which included Scottish representatives. A Scottish response was provided to the public consultation, and we anticipate publication in spring 2025.

ARBD is preventable. This Parliament has supported the decision to continue minimum unit

pricing and to increase the minimum price from 50p to 65p per unit. Public Health Scotland's evaluation of MUP estimated that it has saved hundreds of lives and reduced alcohol-specific hospital admissions. The increase in the minimum unit price is expected to lead to further positive impacts. However, it is not a magic bullet.

The Scottish Government and its partners are developing a population health framework, which will be published in spring. The framework will build on our preventative public health policy of recent years, with actions that seek to tackle the root causes of ill health. It is clear that alcohol harms fall unequally, and targeting the causes of ill health and health inequalities is vital to reducing alcohol harm.

As Ms Mochan will be aware, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care has announced the commissioning of Public Health Scotland to carry out a review of the evidence for the range of options that are available to the Scottish Government in relation to alcohol marketing under devolved powers.

Like Elena Whitham, I recognise the importance of cross-portfolio working and that the issue is wider than public health. Last week, I met Ms Todd and Ms Don-Innes to discuss early childhood development. One area that we covered was our commitment to increase awareness of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which is an issue that Rona Mackay raised. Supporting improved diagnosis is part of helping to deliver on our key priority to eliminate child poverty.

The work on FASD includes clear messaging from the chief medical officer on alcohol consumption during pregnancy, which is included in the "Ready Steady Baby!" guide and on the NHS Inform website. Education and training on FASD, as well as support for families and individuals, are now more available through our work with the Adoption UK FASD hub, which supports individuals and families, including children and young people.

The University of Edinburgh is delivering training to raise awareness among professionals. There is also support for the Aberlour Child Care Trust, which encourages mothers to regain their lives and create the best possible future for themselves and their young children.

Public Health Scotland has made recommendations on revitalising alcohol brief interventions, which have helped to deliver prevention messaging, raised awareness and helped with referrals to specialist support. To ensure that people with co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions have access to high-quality, person-centred care via joined-up services, in 2023, we published mental health core

standards, which promote equality and human rights and help individuals, families and carers to understand what to expect from services. They also aim to eliminate stigma—members have raised that issue today—and discrimination in treatment for those with a dual diagnosis.

The need for services to integrate was one of the drivers of the creation of the integration authorities. The National Care Service (Scotland) Bill seeks to drive further consistency across services. Work on the bill has helped to prepare strategies for better integration by helping areas to take more holistic approaches, as both Foysol Choudhury and Alexander Stewart noted. For example, a new support and improvement framework, improved health and social care standards and a charter of rights will help to deliver the better integration that is necessary to improve support for conditions such as ARBD.

In relation to alcohol policy, some of those strategies are already being delivered through our national mission. A charter of rights on substance use, which was developed by our national collaborative of people with lived and living experience, was published in December 2024. We have committed to publish a service specification for substance use treatments and support services, which will set out what is required locally to deliver on the rights that are set out in the charter. We have also committed to follow that with service standards that will help to improve support for conditions such as ARBD. The introduction of medication assisted treatment standards is already showing some positive change, and similar standards for alcohol services will help to drive improvement there, too.

We have worked with partners to deliver successful public health campaigns on substance use stigma and on naloxone to reduce the risk of death from drug overdose. We will consider the merits of similar campaigns on ARBD, and I would be happy to meet Carol Mochan to discuss that further.

We are taking the actions that I have referred to because we recognise the need to raise awareness and further integrate services to prevent, detect and manage conditions such as ARBD. However, we need to go further. Working with partners on the implementation of the core mental health standards, the established protocol on treatment for dual diagnosis, the population health framework, support for better integration through work on the NCS and the delivery of our substance use national mission, I believe that we will be able to drive a more holistic approach to support for people who are living with or impacted by ARBD.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate.

*Meeting closed at 18:26.*



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