



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 31 October 2019

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Thursday 31 October 2019

CONTENTS

	Col.
GENERAL QUESTION TIME	1
European Union (United Kingdom Departure)	1
Road Kill Reporting (Protected Species).....	2
Asbestos (School Buildings).....	2
Irish Sea Border.....	3
Funded Childcare Expansion	4
Renfrewshire South Economy (Support).....	5
Citizens Assembly of Scotland (Recruitment)	6
Museums and Heritage Sites (Support)	7
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	10
Independence Referendum	10
National Health Service (Workforce).....	12
NHS Tayside (Breast Cancer Treatment)	14
NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Winter Planning Funding)	15
Vulnerable Patients (Engagement with General Practitioner Services).....	15
CS Wind (Workforce Reduction)	16
Aberdeen Art Gallery (Funding).....	17
Dr Gray's Hospital (Maternity Services)	17
Housing Shortage (Short-term Lets)	18
Prisoners (Early Release).....	19
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Assessment).....	20
Trade Deal (Drug Prices).....	21
Drug Deaths.....	21
Cosmetic Surgery (Regulation)	22
School Meals	22
National Health Service (Funding).....	24
HONG KONG	28
<i>Motion debated—[Alex Cole—Hamilton].</i>	
Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD)	28
Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP).....	30
Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	33
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	34
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	36
Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab).....	38
The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop)	40
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	43
SOCIAL SECURITY AND OLDER PEOPLE	43
Disability Assistance and Carers Allowance (Loneliness and Social Isolation)	43
Devolved Benefits (Implementation).....	44
Equality Act 2010 (Single-sex Exemptions)	44
Older People (Inverclyde).....	46
Scottish Child Payment	47
Social Security Benefits (Two-child Cap)	48
Fraud Mitigation.....	49
Social Security Experience Panels (South Scotland).....	50
EUROPEAN UNION FARMING FUNDING (CONVERGENCE FUNDS)	52
<i>Statement—[Fergus Ewing].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing)	52
THE SCOTTISH GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS ANNUAL TARGET REPORT FOR 2017	63
<i>Statement—[Roseanna Cunningham].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham).....	63
FORESTRY ACT 1919 (CENTENARY)	74
<i>Motion moved—[Fergus Ewing].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Colin Smyth].</i>	

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing)	74
Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab)	76
Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con)	79
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green)	81
Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD)	82
Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)	84
Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)	86
Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP)	87
Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab)	89
Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)	90
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)	92
Colin Smyth	94
Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	95
Fergus Ewing	97
BIRMINGHAM COMMONWEALTH GAMES BILL	101
<i>Motion moved—[Joe FitzPatrick].</i>	
SENTENCING (PRE-CONSOLIDATION AMENDMENTS) BILL	102
<i>Motion moved—[Humza Yousaf].</i>	
DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL	103
<i>Motion moved—[Humza Yousaf].</i>	
BUSINESS MOTION	104
<i>Motion moved—[Maurice Golden]—and agreed to.</i>	
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTION	105
<i>Motion moved—[Maurice Golden].</i>	
DECISION TIME	106
CORRECTION	109

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 31 October 2019

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

European Union (United Kingdom Departure)

1. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its view regarding the impact of the UK's departure from the EU. (S5O-03693)

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): The Scottish Government published its assessment of the revised deal yesterday. As I said yesterday, the deal will make Scotland poorer and hit jobs and living standards. It is a worse deal than the one that Theresa May negotiated, and a basic trade agreement of the type that Boris Johnson wants to negotiate will cost each person in Scotland the equivalent of £1,600 compared with the cost of EU membership.

Brexit is already having a damaging effect on Scotland. A recent report from the Fraser of Allander institute highlights that our economy is already around £3 billion smaller than it would have been in the absence of a vote to leave the EU. The damage that the deal will do shows why people in Scotland must have the right to choose their own future.

Annabelle Ewing: I note with some depression what the cabinet secretary said about the hugely negative impacts of Brexit.

With Scottish businesses at a competitive disadvantage, environmental and workers' rights up for the chop and Scotland's voice being ignored, does the cabinet secretary agree that Boris Johnson's bad Brexit deal should, and will, be rejected by the public when they get the chance to have their say?

Michael Russell: The question of consent is a crucial one in that regard. We have strongly expressed our support for the Good Friday agreement and we absolutely agree that Northern Ireland should have the deal that it wishes to have. However, Scotland should be consulted about the deal that we are meant to get, which is a very bad deal and is much worse than the deal for Northern Ireland.

Of course, there is no provision in the agreement for Scotland to consent to it. The Northern Ireland Assembly would have to give consent and the periods of consent would be as

short as four years, yet the Conservatives here and at Westminster refuse to allow the Scottish people or this Parliament a deciding vote on what should happen. That is profoundly antidemocratic, and I believe that they will pay the price for that.

Road Kill Reporting (Protected Species)

2. Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has any plans to support local authorities to report road kill of protected species, such as badgers, to the relevant conservation bodies. (S5O-03694)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government encourages local authorities to report the road kill of protected species to conservation bodies, when appropriate.

Claudia Beamish: It is helpful to conservationists to be able to check badger bodies for signs of illegal activity and to map populations, as illegally killed animals can be placed at the roadside to make them seem like road kill. Is the Scottish Government able to promote, or is it involved with, schemes such as the one in Aberdeenshire, whereby the local authority uses a location app called What3words to report road kills to conservationists? Such schemes can of course also be highlighted to motorists

Fergus Ewing: I am aware that the conservation group Scottish Badgers collects reports of dead badgers, including those that are killed on roads. Anyone who finds a dead badger can report it via a form on its website or by email.

I was not aware of the Aberdeenshire project to which Claudia Beamish referred. She has made her point today, and I will pass it on for the attention of Roseanna Cunningham, who has the portfolio responsibility for dealing with such matters.

Asbestos (School Buildings)

3. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many primary and secondary school buildings contain asbestos. (S5O-03695)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): That information is not held centrally. However, local authorities are required to keep an up-to-date record of the location of asbestos in their school buildings.

Although health and safety legislation is reserved to the United Kingdom Government, we take the issue of asbestos in schools very seriously and expect local authorities to strictly follow Health and Safety Executive recommendations on the handling of asbestos.

Neil Bibby: It is of concern that the Deputy First Minister could not tell us how many school buildings contain asbestos. I can tell him that, according to information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, asbestos is present in more than 1,600 school buildings.

Would the Deputy First Minister agree that there is a strong case for more regular air sampling on the school estate? Would he agree to meet Clydeside Action on Asbestos, trade unions, my colleague, Anas Sarwar, and me to discuss what further action can be taken to ensure that, where asbestos is present, fibre counts are kept at safe levels for children and staff?

John Swinney: Those are important questions and I would be happy to meet Mr Bibby, Mr Sarwar, Clydeside Action on Asbestos and the relevant trade unions that have an interest in the matter. In my earlier answer, I made it clear that there are very strict requirements under health and safety legislation on the handling and management of asbestos. That obligation falls on local authorities, which have the statutory duty for the management of the school estate. I expect all local authorities to follow all those requirements to the full. I am happy to meet the members to discuss the issue further.

Irish Sea Border

4. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what the implications would be for Scotland of a border being established in the Irish Sea. (S5O-03696)

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): As I have already said today, the Scottish Government fully and unconditionally supports the Good Friday agreement and the maintenance of an invisible border on the island of Ireland. However, the new protocol will put Scotland at a competitive disadvantage in relation to Northern Ireland. The United Kingdom Government's plan for its future relationship with the European Union amounts to a hard Brexit—a very hard Brexit—with Scotland being forced out of the single market and customs union, while Northern Ireland will retain privileged access to the EU market.

If the border is created in the Irish Sea, as envisaged, there would be a need to consider infrastructure requirements at Cairnryan ports. That would largely be a matter for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Border Force and the ports themselves. However, Traffic Scotland would have to consider any traffic management requirements in the Dumfries and Galloway area, once more information on the UK proposals became available.

Emma Harper: The cabinet secretary will be aware that, as part of the Scottish Government's Brexit planning, the east pier in Stranraer is set to become a lorry park, to accommodate 350-plus heavy goods vehicles each day, all because of anticipated delays at the port of Cairnryan. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the potential disruption that constituents in Stranraer will be forced to put up with is a direct consequence of the incompetence of the UK Government and that the only way to ensure that such a scenario does not become a reality is to ensure that the current Conservative Government does not return to power?

Michael Russell: I agree. I was astonished to see, in the press in Dumfries and Galloway, objections to what might happen at Stranraer from the local MP, Alister Jack. It is Alister Jack who is imposing Brexit on the people of Scotland. He should be aware of that. We are seeing nimbyism in the extreme from him.

The reality of the situation is that a responsible Government has to prepare plans in the event of there being no deal, to mitigate the worst impacts as best we can. We are working with the local resilience partnership in Dumfries and Galloway on measures to add increased stacking capacities for HGVs at Cairnryan. I have the greatest sympathy for the people of Stranraer who may have to suffer that. They should take it up with their MP, and they have the chance to do that in a direct way on 12 December.

Funded Childcare Expansion

5. **Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress with the expansion to 1,140 hours of funded childcare. (S5O-03697)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Maree Todd): The latest early learning and childcare delivery progress report, published at the start of October, shows that in August, more than 46,000 children were accessing expanded hours. That means that one third of three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds across Scotland are already benefiting from the expanded entitlement.

The latest figures also reveal that 214 nurseries have been built, extended or refurbished since March 2018. In addition, another 120 nurseries are already under construction. Nationally, over the summer, all indicators progressed either in line or ahead of the forecast national position. That is major progress. Although there is still a lot of work to do, we remain confident that local authorities and their partners will be ready to deliver when the 1,140-hours entitlement comes into force next August.

Alison Harris: I thank the minister for her update. The revenue funding rates for private and third-sector childcare provision are published and well documented by councils, but the councils are not required to publish their own rates. It is simply one rule for one, and another rule for another.

The minister has told me on more than one occasion that she will not ask councils to publish that information. My question is very simple: why?

Maree Todd: A key aspect of the funding-follows-the-child model, which is to be introduced in August 2020, is the payment to providers of financially sustainable rates that reflect the cost of delivery and the national policy priorities. Information that was published in summer 2019 showed that the funding rates for private providers increased in all local authority areas over the two years to August this year. Average rates for providers of the delivery of 600 hours increased by 26 per cent over the two years, and many local authorities are also paying a higher rate for those providers that are involved in the delivery of 1,140 hours. In some areas, the increases have been more than 50 per cent. Given that local authority nurseries often operate in areas where the market has failed, calculating the cost of providing local authority provision is an altogether different question.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister guarantee that all children who defer entry to primary 1 in 2020 will also benefit from 1,140 hours of funded childcare, as Parliament instructed just before recess? When will she bring forward the necessary legislation?

Maree Todd: As Iain Gray is aware, Parliament instructed that we review deferral and the automatic entitlement to 1,140 hours. As Iain Gray would expect, we are working closely with local authorities to ensure that we can deliver that as soon as possible.

Renfrewshire South Economy (Support)

6. **Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting the economy in the Renfrewshire South constituency. (S5O-03698)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work (Derek Mackay): The Scottish Government is working to accelerate inclusive economic growth across Scotland and in all the communities in Renfrewshire South. The national economic action plan that I launched supports a competitive business environment, including through investment in a highly skilled workforce and a diverse economy. A range of investments will continue to be made, now and in the future.

Tom Arthur: I recently attended—with Derek Mackay, with the Cabinet Secretary for Culture,

Tourism and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop, and with Paisley's MSP, George Adam—the launch of Renfrewshire Council's bold and ambitious new economic strategy for the coming decade. Does the cabinet secretary share my concerns that the positive collaboration between SNP-led Renfrewshire Council and local partners could be undermined by the Tories' damaging Brexit deal, which Michael Gove admitted at last week's meeting of the Finance and Constitution Committee would give businesses in Northern Ireland better access than Scotland to the 500 million-strong European Union single market?

Derek Mackay: Yes—I agree with that concern. We are not alone in being concerned about the impact that Brexit will have on economies across Scotland—not least in Renfrewshire. Very positive work has been done with the council around the economic plan for the area, where the Government is, as a partner, making the right interventions and investments to help to grow the economy sustainably.

Of course, on the very day of the launch, the co-chair of the partnership—who is a businessman from the Scottish Leather Group—announced 100 new jobs in Renfrewshire, but also expressed concern about the threat of Brexit. So, when we hear people such as Boris Johnson talking about “getting Brexit done”, what that means is doing in people's jobs across Scotland, when we are trying to do so much to grow our economy in a responsible way. We believe that the best way to stop Brexit is to end Brexit, and to end the Tory Government's term of office.

Citizens Assembly of Scotland (Recruitment)

7. **Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how much of the £1.37 million allocated to the Citizens Assembly of Scotland will be spent on recruitment of its members. (S5O-03699)

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): Following a competitive tendering process, a contract worth £25,000 was awarded to Mark Diffley Consultancy and Research Ltd. The recruitment of members has concluded and the assembly met for the first time on 26 and 27 October. Members are being paid a gift of thanks for participating in the assembly, as well as being supported to attend the assembly regardless of their geographic location, their need for childcare and other caring responsibilities, or their other needs for support. The total cost of payments to members and conveners, including support for travel and subsistence, is £339,600.

Gordon Lindhurst: With the Scottish Parliament costing more than £250,000 a day, would not it be better, more democratic and more

effective if the Scottish National Party Government were to start listening to the Scottish electorate, rather than creating yet another costly group to blame for its failed policies?

Michael Russell: I regret that Gordon Lindhurst has that curmudgeonly approach to democracy. I encourage him to meet members of the Citizens Assembly; I am sure that its conveners would be happy to meet him. I had the privilege of meeting them on Saturday night here in Edinburgh, when I was bowled over by their commitment to, engagement in and energy and enthusiasm for being involved in Scottish democracy. That is to be commended—not condemned. Mr Lindhurst might want to consider whether what he has said encourages or discourages participation in democracy.

Museums and Heritage Sites (Support)

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Following funding cuts to cash-strapped Moray Council, the future of the award-winning Falconer museum in Forres is under threat. It is a fantastic example of a local museum that is grounded in its community and works to appeal to visitors and local people alike. Will the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs look into the situation and outline what other funding solutions might be possible to keep the Falconer museum going, as a vital part of our heritage?

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Mr Halcro Johnston, I think that you have asked your supplementary question, rather than the main question. I ask the cabinet secretary to respond to the published question.

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The current council administration in Moray is having to deal with the incompetence of the Conservative-led administration that walked away from leadership. That is only been compounded by the incompetence with which the Conservative member, Jamie Halcro Johnston, just asked—or did not ask—his proper question.

The Scottish Government supports direct revenue funding of National Museums of Scotland, National Galleries of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland, the National Mining Museum Scotland, the Scottish Fisheries Museum, the Scottish Maritime Museum and Historic Environment Scotland.

Museums Galleries Scotland supports local, independent and private museums, including the one that Jamie Halcro Johnston asked about in his question, which I will try to answer. It might be helpful if administrations—

The Presiding Officer: I will give Mr Halcro Johnston another chance to ask the supplementary question.

Fiona Hyslop: I have heard it and am quite happy to answer it. I am keen for the next question to be asked, so I will answer the supplementary question.

Museums Galleries Scotland stands ready to act, and has already proactively contacted Moray Council about the Falconer Trust. I share the concerns of the people of Forres and I understand how important the museum is to them. However, it is important for Moray Council to make contact with Museums Galleries Scotland, which has, as I said, already contacted the council.

Let us try to find a solution that helps the people of Forres and ensures that the heritage of that vital part of our country is celebrated. Museums Galleries Scotland stands ready to support Moray Council constructively. I hope that that offer is accepted.

The Presiding Officer: I will allow Jamie Halcro Johnston to ask the end of his supplementary question.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I apologise for being so keen to get an answer from the cabinet secretary that I got a bit ahead of myself. Unfortunately, although I asked the cabinet secretary my second question, I did not get an answer.

The question is about a decision that was made by Moray Council, which has been underfunded time and again by the Scottish Government. Rather than the cabinet secretary giving a list of examples of bodies that are being sponsored, can she tell me specifically what she can do to help Falconer museum, which is being underfunded by an SNP council—*[Interruption]*—that has been underfunded by the SNP Government?

The Presiding Officer: Colleagues, I see that you are in a lively mood, but I suggest that we should hear the question then the cabinet secretary's answer.

Fiona Hyslop: I acknowledge—in a constructive way—that we regularly discuss fair funding of local government in the chamber. I have made the offer that Museums Galleries Scotland, as the relevant development body, talk to Moray Council. If Jamie Halcro Johnston was really serious about the museum, he would—rather than the party-political point scoring that he tried incompetently—encourage all those who are interested in the matter to have a constructive dialogue with Museums Galleries Scotland. That would be the competent way to carry out his duties as a responsible MSP.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): On behalf of my constituents and the trustees of the Trimontium museum of Roman Scotland, in Melrose, can I thank the Government for the substantial investment that was recently announced for an extension to the museum?

Fiona Hyslop: I am delighted that my colleague Fergus Ewing was able to announce that funding. To add an important point, I say that I am delighted that the south of Scotland economic partnership is taking heritage culture and tourism seriously through supporting museums and recognising the economic contribution that heritage makes to the economic wellbeing of the member's constituency and the rest of the south of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: Before we move to First Minister's question time, I invite members to join me in welcoming to our gallery Linda Scott, who is the High Commissioner of the Republic of Namibia to the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. [Applause.]

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): As this is our first First Minister's question time since recess, I would like to announce to the chamber that David McGill has been appointed as the Parliament's new clerk and chief executive. David's appointment follows an open competition and selection process involving all the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body members, alongside a senior representative from the National Assembly for Wales. Many of you will already know David as one of our assistant chief executives and I am sure that you will share the selection panel's view that he will be an outstanding successor to Sir Paul Grice, leading the Parliament through the next few years. [Applause.]

Independence Referendum

1. **Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** Yesterday, Jeremy Corbyn again declared that he is prepared to grant an independence referendum if he becomes Prime Minister. Given that they are here and that they have given in, would the First Minister like to thank Labour Party members personally?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Actually, the pact that I am most interested in this morning is the one that I read about in *The Times* between Labour and the Tories to help the Liberal Democrats in Ian Blackford's seat. I am confident that Ian Blackford will see that off without too much difficulty.

I have to say that I think that United Kingdom Labour's position on an independence referendum is a lot more democratic than that of Scottish Labour, which opposes independence and does not want another referendum. UK Labour recognises that it is down to the people of Scotland to decide that question. That is a basic issue of democracy.

Conversely, the position of the Tories, Scottish Labour and the Liberal Democrats appears to be to say to the Scottish people at the very start of an election campaign: "We don't care how you vote. We're going to ignore you, however you vote." Why would anybody vote for such a contemptuous attitude?

The choice for the people of Scotland at this election is clear: it is Brexit—and a bad Brexit at that—with the Tories, or it is stopping Brexit with the Scottish National Party and putting the right to choose Scotland's future and the right to choose independence into the hands of the people of Scotland.

Jackson Carlaw: Both the First Minister and I can agree that there is nothing that anyone can do to help the Liberal Democrats and that it will take more than a spoonful of sugar to swallow anything that their leader is offering. However, just two weeks ago at her party conference, the First Minister said that Jeremy Corbyn should not even pick up the phone if he was not prepared to agree to a referendum. Now that Mr Corbyn has made plain that he is, indeed, happy to concede to having that referendum, is it not obvious to everyone that the First Minister would roll out the red carpet herself in Downing Street so that Corbyn could walk into number 10?

The First Minister: What has become obvious to Scotland over the past few years is that, whether it is the Tories or Labour, the Westminster system is broken. That is why the people of Scotland need the choice of independence, and only the Scottish National Party will give the people of Scotland the choice over our own future. I do not want Boris Johnson to be determining the future of Scotland. I want that choice to be the people's choice, and that is what they will get if they vote SNP.

Jackson Carlaw: I am a little puzzled that the First Minister is being so coy because, like me, she does not rate Mr Corbyn. Only last month she said that she was “no fan”. Worse, she has described him as “pitifully ineffective”, “unreliable” and “unelectable.” Perhaps she can enlighten the chamber—what is it that first attracted her to the independence referendum-supporting Jeremy Corbyn?

The First Minister: I do not know whether this will come as a shock to anybody—I am not sure that I am giving the newspapers or broadcasters any great exclusive—but I announce that I think that the leaders of the main two United Kingdom parties are completely and utterly useless. I do not think that they have got Scotland's interests at heart. That is one of the many reasons why I think that Scotland needs to be independent. That would allow us to be a country at the top table in Europe, to invest Scotland's wealth in our public services and to lift children out of poverty.

I am determined to give the people of Scotland the choice to be independent. On 12 December, if voters want to stop Brexit and take charge of the future of Scotland, they should vote SNP. That is the clear and unequivocal message from my party at this election.

Jackson Carlaw: This Saturday, the First Minister will start her election campaign the only way she knows how: by ignoring the priorities of most people in Scotland, refusing to listen to the majority and instead addressing yet another SNP independence rally in Glasgow.

The choice is clear: either Scotland moves forward together and puts the constitutional division of the past few years behind us, or we choose more division, more uncertainty and the prospect of a Corbyn-Sturgeon alliance dividing us all over again. A vote for the Scottish Conservatives is a vote to end the division, get Brexit sorted and say no to another independence referendum. Is that not the choice for the people of Scotland?

The First Minister: I can understand why Jackson Carlaw is feeling a little bit irate. His party has so much—or, perhaps, so little—confidence in him that it has put the picture of a back bencher on its election letters instead of his picture. I understand why he is feeling a little bit sensitive this morning. *[Interruption.]* I think that I might have touched a raw nerve there.

I have got news for Jackson Carlaw. Yesterday, I started my election campaign in Stirling, because that is one of my constituencies where my party plans to oust a Tory MP. I am looking forward immensely to the election, because everybody across Scotland knows that the only way to end the Tory-created Brexit division is to stop Brexit in its tracks. On 12 December, people will have the choice to vote SNP, to stop Brexit and to give the people of Scotland the right to choose a better, brighter future as an independent country.

National Health Service (Workforce)

2. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): In 2013, the Scottish Government published its 2020 workforce vision for the national health service. It undertook to make the health service

“a great place to work”.

Does the First Minister believe that her Government is keeping its commitment to all NHS staff?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The NHS is an incredibly difficult place for staff to work in. I think that that has always been the case, but, as we see demand in our NHS rising, it is even more the case now. I was struck by Audit Scotland's report last week, which recognises that the NHS is seeing and treating more patients than ever before. I have nothing but respect and gratitude for everyone who works in our NHS. This Government stands by them and will continue to support them.

Under this Government, staffing levels in our NHS are up by more than 13,000 whole-time equivalent staff, which is a more than 10 per cent increase. We pay many of our NHS staff better than they are paid elsewhere in the United Kingdom. We will continue to support our NHS staff. Every one of them has the right to expect nothing less.

Richard Leonard: The First Minister mentioned last week's Audit Scotland report. Last week, when publishing her report, the Auditor General said:

"The NHS in Scotland is running too hot, with intense pressure on staff".

Over the past year, professional bodies and trade unions have raised concerns that the NHS workforce is under growing pressure and faces staff burn-out. In view of that, Scottish Labour made freedom of information requests, which revealed that last year in Scotland, 3.5 million working hours in the NHS were lost to sickness absence—caused by stress or anxiety or for mental health-related reasons. That is a quarter of all sickness hours lost and a rise of more than 50 per cent in four years. Those workers are being let down. What does the First Minister intend to do about it?

The First Minister: We will continue to support those who work in the NHS. Sickness absence levels in the NHS fluctuate, but they have remained relatively stable in recent years. Of course, as I said in my original answer, more people work in our NHS now than did when this Government took office. The Audit Scotland report also confirmed that, over the past 10 years, the health budget has increased in real terms by 6 per cent. Most of that increase has been in the past five years. In tough times for our NHS—in that regard, the Scottish NHS is not unique—we will continue to support our front-line staff in the essential work that they do.

I mentioned the increase in the NHS budget. Let us cast our minds back to the most recent Scottish election and Labour's spending proposal for the NHS. If Labour had been elected and had implemented that proposal, our NHS, in this financial year, would be £758 million worse off than it is now. That is the equivalent of 19,000 nurses. This Government will stand by our NHS staff. I am not sure that Labour would have done the same.

Richard Leonard: The sickness absence figures that I mentioned do not look like the Government standing by NHS staff. NHS workers are the heart of our health service and they are being badly let down. In the end, patients suffer, too: the treatment time guarantee has been breached more than 230,000 times; last year, delayed discharges from hospital were up by 6 per cent; and 20,000 more people were left waiting in accident and emergency for more than four hours—that is up by 17 per cent.

The Scottish National Party has been running Scotland's health service for more than 12 years. Today, the human cost for patients and NHS staff is plain to see.

That health crisis has blown up on the First Minister's watch. It is her responsibility. What does Scotland's national health service need: another decade of the cuts that were prescribed by her blueprint for independence or the £70 billion of investment in our public services that would result from the election of a Labour Government?

The First Minister: Under this Government, there have been real-terms increases in NHS spending. As I said a couple of answers ago, there has been a rise in the number of people who work in our national health service. As in many countries, demand on the Scottish health service is rising. However, as last week's Audit Scotland report said, in 2018-19, the number of people who were seen on time increased for

"seven of the eight standards".

That means that the waiting times targets were met for more people in 2018-19 than in 2017-18. Therefore, the work that we are doing is leading to the improvements that we need to see in our national health service.

I go back to the point that I made earlier. Richard Leonard talks about the election of a Labour Government. In a few weeks, people in Scotland will have the opportunity to choose how to vote, and I look forward to them making that choice. However, if Scotland had elected a Labour Government in 2016, the fact of the matter is—it is a fact, because Richard Leonard cannot deny it—that this year, the NHS would have been more than £750 million poorer and would not have been able to afford to employ thousands of nurses. That is what would have happened if a Labour Government had been elected. It is only because there is an SNP Government in Scotland today that the NHS in Scotland is the best performing anywhere in the UK.

The Presiding Officer: We have a few constituency supplementaries, the first of which is from Liz Smith.

NHS Tayside (Breast Cancer Treatment)

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): What action is the First Minister's Government taking to address the concerns of NHS Tayside's oncology team regarding the recent controversy over breast cancer treatments? Will assurances be provided to each patient involved that they will receive full and accurate information about their treatment?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Assurances have already been provided to patients. Any patient who remains concerned should, of course, contact their general practitioner or NHS Tayside directly. We want to make it absolutely clear that patients should be given the assurance and the confidence that they require.

As far as clinicians are concerned, it is important that guidance, guidelines and recommendations are followed when it comes to the prescribing of any drugs and medication. It is vital that that is the case. The national health service will continue to discuss the matter carefully with clinicians. In fact, I understand that the medical director of NHS Tayside is currently in discussion with the Royal College of Physicians on how best to proceed, and I am sure that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport would be happy to provide any further information.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Winter Planning Funding)

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has reported that the money that it is set to receive for winter pressures this year is £1 million, which is less than half of what it received for last year, and it is not the only health board in that position.

Given the expectation of a severe winter, the ever-increasing number of accident and emergency admissions and the fact that performance on the four-hour target for patients to be treated and discharged is getting worse, does the First Minister believe that £1 million will be enough to enable NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to cope with winter pressures?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am genuinely not sure whether Jackie Baillie was in the chamber when, I think—if my memory serves me correctly—Murdo Fraser asked me that question the week before the recess. The money that was announced by the health secretary a couple of weeks ago was the first tranche of the money for winter planning. A subsequent tranche will be announced shortly, so that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and other health boards across the country have the money that they need to undertake the winter planning that requires to be done.

Vulnerable Patients (Engagement with General Practitioner Services)

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): A notice has been on display in a GP's practice in Springburn in my constituency that informs potential new patients that certain drugs, including diazepam, temazepam and morphine, or any of its alternatives, are not normally prescribed. The notice states that new patients would be expected to engage in appropriate withdrawal programmes. I do not doubt the good intentions behind the notice, but concerns have been raised with me that it might deter vulnerable individuals from registering with a GP in the first place.

How will the Scottish Government seek to support GP practices to develop a consistent approach that encourages drug users to engage with services in the first place and to ensure that appropriate services to support recovery are widely available in our communities?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I thank Bob Doris for raising an important issue. I can certainly understand the concerns that he has raised, and I appreciate the constructive way in which he has done so.

I am very clear that integration authorities and alcohol and drug partnerships must provide services that meet the needs of their resident populations, and that they must do so in a way that does not stigmatise people who need support.

Prescribers should follow national and local prescribing guidance in prescribing methadone, benzodiazepines and other medicines that might be used to manage people with problematic drug use. All services that are delivered and all medicines that are prescribed must be based on clinical need and should be discussed with patients in the context of their long-term recovery.

CS Wind (Workforce Reduction)

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the announcement by CS Wind that it is to reduce its workforce in Campbeltown by three quarters. That is a devastating blow for the workforce—and for the whole country, given that CS Wind is the only manufacturer of wind turbines in Scotland. What steps has the First Minister taken to protect those jobs and to assist the workforce at this difficult time?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I thank Rhoda Grant for raising the issue. I know that this will be an exceptionally difficult time for the workers who have been served redundancy notices at the CS Wind turbine facility in Machrihanish. The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands spoke with CS Wind management just a couple of days ago to discuss the reasons behind the decision. We believe that it is about a gap in the order book, and is not about future prospects or long-term sustainability. The Scottish Government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise are committed to doing all that we can to mitigate the impact of the redundancy notices. Dialogue continues with the company and any steps that can be taken to support the company to ensure its long-term sustainability and success are steps that we are prepared to take.

Aberdeen Art Gallery (Funding)

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): I remind colleagues that I am a councillor in the city of Aberdeen.

The First Minister has seen the transformative effect that the new V&A museum has had on the city of Dundee—a project that the Scottish Government rightly agreed to contribute to. However, when Aberdeen City Council applied for funding for the new Aberdeen art gallery, which opens tonight and has similar potential for the city of Aberdeen, that application was turned down. Will the First Minister look again at that decision, to ensure that Aberdeen gets its fair share and is able to benefit from a thriving artistic community?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I thank Tom Mason for raising the issue for two reasons. First, it gives me the opportunity to welcome the new Aberdeen art gallery, which is due to reopen on 2 November. I look forward to having the opportunity to visit it, and I am sure that it is an absolutely first-class attraction that will be a real credit to the city of Aberdeen.

However, it also gives me the opportunity to address a point that I understand was made at an event last night and has been repeated in the chamber by Tom Mason today. To set the record straight, during the planning or business case stage, Aberdeen City Council made no approach to the Scottish Government, Historic Environment Scotland or Creative Scotland. *[Nicola Sturgeon has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]* Aberdeen City Council discussed funding with Historic Environment Scotland in 2016 after project works had already begun, but the council chose not to pursue an application for funding. It is a bit rich to criticise the Scottish Government for not giving funding when the council in question never asked us for funding. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Dr Gray's Hospital (Maternity Services)

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): In August 2018, maternity services at Dr Gray's hospital in Elgin were downgraded. In November of that year, the chief medical officer's advisory group reported that NHS Grampian must produce a comprehensive plan and a clear timetable for the restoration of those services. It is now certain that the issue will not be resolved by the end of this year, as was pledged, meaning another winter of expectant mothers and their families travelling from Moray to hospitals in Inverness and Aberdeen for vital care. Local campaigners are concerned that the revised timetable to restore services by spring 2020 also shows little sign of being met.

Can the First Minister tell us why those clear timetables are being missed and what she will do about it?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I thank the member for raising what I know is an important issue in that part of Scotland. We want mothers to deliver their babies as close to home as is safely possible. The issues around maternity services at Dr Gray's are issues of patient safety. Patient safety has guided decisions up until now and patient safety will guide decisions from here on. The health secretary remains in close contact with the health board about the issues around the restoration of those services, but patient safety will continue to be the guiding principle. I think that everybody would understand and expect that to be the case.

Housing Shortage (Short-term Lets)

3. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): We have grown used to waiting for the Scottish National Party Government to act on a whole range of issues. We are waiting for the health and social care workforce plan; we are waiting for our new state-of-the-art children's hospital to open; we are waiting for a real ban on fox hunting and for an end to the indiscriminate slaughter of Scotland's wildlife on our grouse moors; and we are waiting for the First Minister's Government to start meeting its own climate change targets.

Over the past three years, the number of homes lost to short-term lets has tripled, making a home an ever-more distant prospect for tens of thousands of people in Scotland. Can the First Minister tell me how long we have to wait until her Government introduces the controls that are urgently needed to protect our communities?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We will set out our proposals following our consultation later this year, and since this year is beginning to draw to a close, that will be pretty soon.

Alison Johnstone: My colleague Andy Wightman first raised the issue with the minister almost two years ago, in November 2017. He also amended the Planning (Scotland) Bill—his amendment offered a way forward. Parliament appeared supportive, but at the last minute, the First Minister's Government sided with the Conservatives to block the amendment and give us a "Tory-style" planning bill, as the Conservative spokesperson so gleefully described it. Yet again, an SNP Government is too timid to take action.

Here in Edinburgh, short-term lets are out of control, and on Skye, one fifth of all homes are short-term lets—in the midst of a housing crisis. The public is demanding action. Even SNP MSPs who voted against controls are now demanding

action. Will the First Minister give us a date when short-term lets will finally be regulated?

The First Minister: I addressed the timescale in my earlier answer, but the rest of the member's question is a complete mischaracterisation. Alison Johnstone is wrong in what she is saying.

In his amendments to the Planning (Scotland) Bill, Andy Wightman was trying to impose on all parts of the country a solution that may be right for Edinburgh, but the fact of the matter is that we do not see exactly the same pressures in all parts of the country. We therefore took the view that, instead of imposing an inappropriate one-size-fits-all policy, it would be better to allow local authorities to decide whether short-term let control areas were required in their part of the country. That is the kind of devolved decision making for local authorities that the Greens usually pop up in the chamber to demand that we do more of.

The Presiding Officer: We have further supplementaries.

Prisoners (Early Release)

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The power to release prisoners two days early exists to avoid the situation in which released offenders are unable to access services during the weekend that are crucial to getting them on the road to a law-abiding life. Over the past three years, the power has been used just 15 times, despite more than 11,000 Friday releases.

In November 2016, the First Minister gave an undertaking to my former colleague Douglas Ross that she would look into the matter. Can she explain why there have been no improvements since that undertaking?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Decisions concerning the release of prisoners should be taken for the right reasons and with consideration of what is right for the reintegration of prisoners into the community.

Our programme of reform of sentencing is under way. We want to make sure that the people who should be and deserve to be in prison are in prison; where other sentences are appropriate, we want to make sure that they are available. On the release of prisoners, the first and most important thing that we take account of is the interests of victims, but we also recognise that, on occasion, the early release of prisoners is in the interests of wider communities, because it helps with the reintegration process.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Assessment)

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I remind the chamber of my diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

In June 2018, I sent ministers a copy of a letter that NHS Grampian sent to an adult denying them an assessment for ADHD, baldly stating that the board did not assess adults as a matter of policy. Despite assurances made to both Clare Haughey and me that the policy would change, on 23 October this year, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman upheld a complaint against NHS Grampian for that continued practice. In its report, the ombudsman stated:

"We also found that their approach was not in keeping with the relevant clinical guidance or the Scottish Government's mental health strategy".

The ombudsman also required the immediate reinstatement of an interim regime for assessments.

I am concerned that that practice is confined neither to ADHD nor to NHS Grampian. I have received reports of the practice happening elsewhere in Scotland and for conditions such as autism.

Will the First Minister contact NHS Grampian as a matter of urgency, to ensure that the measures that I mentioned are put in place? Will she urgently probe whether other health boards are also carrying out the practice of denying adults assessments? For me, diagnosis was a vital first step in transforming my life and that of my family, so does she agree that nobody should be denied that opportunity through being denied an assessment for ADHD or autism as an adult?

The First Minister: The short answer is that I agree with all Daniel Johnson's points. Today, I will make sure that NHS Grampian is contacted. I would expect the health board to take account of and implement the recommendations that the ombudsman has made. I will ask the health secretary to look into the wider issues in terms of the practices and approaches of other health boards. I also agree that diagnosis is vital to allowing people to take the steps that they need to take and have the support and treatment that they need to live full lives with a condition.

I know that the health secretary would be happy to meet with Daniel Johnson, if that would be of interest to him, to discuss how those issues can be taken forward. I thank him for raising what I know is an important issue not just to him personally, but to many people across the country.

Trade Deal (Drug Prices)

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The First Minister will be aware of reports by Channel 4's "Dispatches" that the United Kingdom Government has had a series of meetings with US pharmaceutical firms to discuss raising drug prices as part of a post-Brexit trade deal. Donald Trump famously said that the NHS would be "on the table" in trade deal discussions. Will the First Minister do everything in her power to protect our national health service from a Tory sell-out?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Emma Harper is right to raise that issue—[*Interruption.*]

I know that the Tories are not particularly bothered about the real and present threat to our national health service, but there is one. I do not think that there is any doubt that, if they are left to their own devices and if they get their way, a Boris Johnson-led Government would open up our national health service to Donald Trump in the interests of trade deals. Yesterday we even heard Boris Johnson, in the House of Commons, almost threatening to take control of the NHS away from this Parliament and this Government, which should alarm people across Scotland.

The way to ensure that we protect our health service—not to magic away all its problems and challenges, because health services everywhere have challenges—and invest in it, keep it in public hands and ensure that it remains the best-performing NHS anywhere in the UK, is to continue with the investment and reform that this Government is taking forward.

Drug Deaths

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): It has been four months since we heard that 1,187 people in Scotland died from drugs last year. I lost my neighbour; other people have lost friends, mothers and whole families. I cannot believe that I am saying this, but things are getting even worse. STV news revealed this week that the number of residential rehabilitation beds in Glasgow is down from 52 to just 14. When are we going to stop just talking about this and start acting?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): That is a hugely important issue. I do not believe that it is the case that we are simply talking and not acting. The Government is taking a range of actions, not least increasing funding for alcohol and drug treatment services, which can be used as appropriate to build services in different areas. We have also established the drug death task force, which is tasked with coming up with further steps and solutions that we require to take.

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing is overseeing all that work and remains willing to discuss it and to meet members from

across the chamber as, collectively, we address an issue that must be addressed for the reasons that all of us understand only too well.

Cosmetic Surgery (Regulation)

4. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to improve the regulation of the cosmetic surgery industry in Scotland. (S5F-03663)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Scotland was the first country in the UK, back in April 2016, to introduce any form of statutory regulation of cosmetic surgery. As a result, an independent clinic providing cosmetic procedures run by a doctor, dentist, nurse, midwife or dental technician is required to be registered and inspected by Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

In addition, we have been working with the General Medical Council to introduce a framework for the credentialing of medical skills, including a credential in cosmetic surgery, in collaboration with the Royal College of Surgeons. That would apply across the UK, and we expect it to be approved in the near future.

Stuart McMillan: The First Minister might be aware that I previously raised the need for regulation of facial aesthetic procedures on behalf of a concerned constituent and a practitioner. I understand that work on phase 2 of the regulation of independent clinics is very much under way. Can the First Minister advise me when those forthcoming regulations will come forward for public consultation?

The First Minister: I recognise that Stuart McMillan has raised this issue before, and I thank him for doing so. Cosmetic procedures that are provided by non-healthcare professionals within non-regulated sites are currently not subject to the same level of scrutiny as those that are undertaken by medically qualified healthcare professionals. As Stuart McMillan observed, that is being addressed in phase 2 of our work on the regulation of independent clinics, which seeks to ensure a similar level of safety and assurance for those sites.

The Scottish cosmetic interventions expert group is developing a range of options to regulate the sector. I advise Stuart McMillan that the group will put forward proposals very soon, with a view to holding a public consultation process on the options by the end of this year.

School Meals

5. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to encourage the uptake of

school meals, especially among children eligible for free school meals. (S5F-03668)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Access to healthy and nutritious school meals is essential, given the benefits that such meals provide to people's learning as well as to their current and future health. The Government places such value on school meals that we introduced universal provision for every child from primaries 1 to 3, which was a plan that the Tories voted against.

When Tory changes to tax credits threatened to strip entitlement from 22,000 children in Scotland, we changed the rules to ensure that they would still be able to get a meal. The fundamental difference between the Scottish Government and the Tory Government is that we always look for ways to lift children out of poverty, while Tory welfare reforms are pushing more and more children into poverty.

Brian Whittle: People would not believe that there is an election coming up, would they? Food poverty is a topic that is raised many times in Parliament, with much finger pointing and blame, as we have seen. However, a recent study has shown that many Scottish children—up to 40 per cent in some areas—do not take up their free school meal entitlement. We talk about food poverty, yet so much food is thrown out from our schools and hospitals. In a country where farmers produce some of the highest quality food in the world, is it not about time for the Scottish Government to take a genuine system-wide approach that links food production, nutrition and food waste, and that encourages the uptake of school meals, particularly for those who are eligible for free school meals?

The First Minister: We want to encourage the uptake of free school meals. The latest statistics, which were published in September, show an increase in the number of pupils who are registered for free school meals, and I want that increase to continue.

I say to Brian Whittle that what I have said has nothing to do with there being an election; I am just pointing out some facts. One of the problems is that the Tories in this chamber say things about, and demand things of, this Government, while expecting us to ignore the actions that their colleagues in Westminster are taking. The actions of a Tory Government at Westminster are, right now, pushing more and more children into poverty, including food poverty. Food bank use is growing in this country because of Tory welfare cuts, which is the first reason why it is a bit rich for Brian Whittle to ask me the question that he asked.

The second reason is that we have recognised the importance of free school meals by introducing universal provision for children in primaries 1 to 3.

Brian Whittle would have a lot more credibility in asking his question if the Tories had not voted against that policy. How about the Tories thinking about their actions and ensuring that they match their rhetoric in the future?

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): In Glasgow, 3,500 families are eligible for free school meals, but those families, who are among the poorest, are not claiming, so we have to get to the bottom of why they are not doing so.

The First Minister will be aware that the delivery plan for the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 includes a specific commitment to support local authorities in considering automatic payment of benefits. Ministers have supported that concept in the past, but what progress has the Scottish Government made in supporting local authorities to automate benefits? I realise that that is not easy, but does the First Minister agree that finding a way to automate more benefits such as free school meals would help the poorest children and help to tackle poverty in Glasgow and across Scotland?

The First Minister: I agree with that general point. The more automation there is, the more we can increase uptake and ensure that people get the benefits to which they are entitled. We will continue to work with the Department for Work and Pensions and with local authorities to try to make more progress.

Of course, one of the most important things that we can do, particularly in relation to free school meals, is to make provision universal so that there is no stigma and so that we make it easier for young people to uptake the entitlement.

I said in response to Brian Whittle that the latest statistics show an increase in the number of pupils registered. Pauline McNeill talked specifically about Glasgow, and I point out that that increase is partly due to the introduction of universal eligibility to all primary 4 pupils in Glasgow city as a result of action taken by this Administration.

We will continue to do what we can to lift children out of poverty. Free school meals are part of that, as is the new Scottish child payment, but as long as we have one hand tied behind our back because so many welfare decisions are taken by Westminster Governments we will not be able to make as much progress as we want. That is why the sooner that Labour joins us in arguing for all welfare policy to be devolved to this Parliament the better, and perhaps the more credibility it would have in raising such issues.

National Health Service (Funding)

6. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the projected £1.8

billion shortfall in NHS funding outlined in the Audit Scotland report, "NHS in Scotland 2019". (S5F-03662)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We did not just respond to that; we anticipated it. If Monica Lennon recalls, in the Scottish Government's framework for health and social care, which was published last year, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport made it clear that because, as we all recognise, demand for our services is rising, we require reform in our health service to the value of £1.8 billion by 2023-24. That is in addition to the significant investment that is planned over that period. Audit Scotland's report simply agrees with that assessment.

The Scottish Government continues to follow a twin approach of both investment and reform, further increasing our health investment to a record £14 billion and delivering sustainable improvements to secure better outcomes for people who use health and social care services. Lastly, on investment, as I have already pointed out to Richard Leonard, Labour's spending plans in the last Scottish election would have seen £758 million less funding for our NHS in this year alone, which is equivalent to 19,000 nurses.

Monica Lennon: I would like to share the First Minister's optimism about her investment plans, but health boards are struggling to break even at the moment. Under her Scottish National Party Government, the two largest NHS boards, Lothian and Greater Glasgow and Clyde, are predicting deficits of more than £151 million. Does the First Minister accept that those deficits are an indictment of her Government's mismanagement of the NHS?

The First Minister: No, I do not. It is because of the investment decisions that the Government has taken that we have record funding in our health service. That funding would be £758 million lower had Labour had its way. We work with health boards to help them to manage their financial position. The health secretary has introduced more flexibility in how health boards manage their budgets and we will continue to increase funding in our national health service.

Interestingly, I stand to be corrected if I am misremembering this or have got it wrong in any way, but my memory tells me that at no point over the past few years in the annual budget negotiations has Labour come to Derek Mackay and asked for more money for the national health service. Labour has to decide where its priorities lie. We know that, if Labour was in office, the health service would have less money to spend and that, when it has the chance to do so, Labour never argues for more money for the health service.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Record funding has come from the United Kingdom Conservative Government, which the First Minister has failed to mention. However, looking at the Audit Scotland report, we see that spending on nursing agency and bank staff has soared by more than one fifth under her Government. Does the First Minister think that that is anything to do with her decision to cut the number of student nurse places while she was health secretary, or is it someone else's fault?

The First Minister: For the past number of years, we have increased the number of nurse students and we have record numbers of staff in our national health service. Miles Briggs should probably think about the fact that in an organisation the size of the national health service, things such as nurse banks are essential to ensure that services can be delivered. The biggest challenge for NHS recruitment right now is, of course, Brexit, and the Tories should be hanging their heads in shame that they are the ones who are trying to impose it on Scotland.

Given that I have pointed out the implications of Labour's policy for health service budgets, it is only fair that I do the same for the Tories. If we had followed the plans that the Tories wanted us to when Derek Mackay was setting his budget—if we had handed those tax cuts to the richest earners in our society—there would be £650 million less in our national health service right now. That would be the cost of the Tory policy, which is why people in Scotland will never trust the Conservatives with the national health service.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): NHS Lothian is £90 million in debt, and that impacts on patients. What does the First Minister have to say to a constituent of mine who needs an urgent brain operation for excruciating nerve pain but who cannot get it because of the shambles at the sick kids hospital, where the neurological centre is to be located? That woman cannot work or drive. She is reliant on benefits, and she lives taking more than 48 tablets a day. That is the human face of the scandal at the sick kids hospital. What is the First Minister going to do about that to help my constituent, who lives in agony?

The First Minister: The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport gave an update to Parliament yesterday on the sick kids hospital situation. It is an important point that services that are intended to be provided in the new building are being provided on current sites.

I do not know the circumstances of the case that Neil Findlay has raised, but I would be happy to have the health secretary look into it.

What we will continue to do for all patients in our national health service is not deny the challenges that it faces, but ensure that we invest the sums of

money that are required, employ the numbers of staff that are required, and undertake the reforms that our health service needs so that it can continue to be the high-performing health service that it is, thanks to the tens of thousands of staff who work in it day and daily.

Miles Briggs: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In her response to Emma Harper's question, the First Minister failed to outline her links to the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. Nicola Sturgeon has hosted lavish dinners for that US-based private health giant at Edinburgh castle. Since then, private meetings have resulted in the First Minister and SNP ministers holding more private meetings and the company being awarded a £2 million hospital contract. Through your good office, Presiding Officer, how can Parliament hold SNP ministers and their dealings with private companies to account?

The Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Briggs for raising that matter as a point of order. As he may know, it is up to each individual member to decide whether to make a declaration on any conflict of interest. I am sure that all members will be aware of that.

I suspend the meeting to allow new guests to arrive in the gallery.

12:47

Meeting suspended.

12:48

On resuming—

Hong Kong

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-19293, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, on Hong Kong. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament believes that people in the Edinburgh Western constituency, and across Scotland, are deeply concerned by what it considers the escalating seriousness of the current situation in Hong Kong; recalls the long and close ties between Scotland and Hong Kong, which are evident throughout the territory; considers that human rights are currently under threat; supports peaceful and legitimate pro-democracy protests; notes the calls for a full, independent investigation into the reported police violence during the protests; believes that the UK has a legal and moral duty to the people of Hong Kong, and stands with the people of Hong Kong in support of their rights, freedoms and campaign for what it considers genuine democracy.

12:49

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am very grateful for the time to raise the issue of Hong Kong in Parliament. I am also grateful to members of the Labour Party and the Green Party who signed my motion, which expresses concern about the seriousness of the current situation in Hong Kong.

It is right that Parliament takes an interest in what is happening in Hong Kong, because the ties between Scotland and Hong Kong are strong. That can be seen in Hong Kong's road signs, from Aberdeen Street to Dundas Street. Countless Scots call Hong Kong home, and vice versa.

The situation in Hong Kong has become a powder keg. For five months we have seen protest after protest. Views are becoming more and more entrenched and the situation shows no signs of abating.

One of the most densely populated and high-tech modern cities on the planet is now regularly brought to a standstill. Thousands of protesters have been arrested, among them 750 children. There have been serious casualties: a journalist has been blinded in one eye, and more than 1,000 people have been treated in hospital for injuries. Earlier this month we saw footage of a teenager being shot in the chest with live ammunition at point-blank range, by a police officer.

The international community needs to keep up the pressure for a full independent investigation into police violence in Hong Kong. Amnesty

International says that the approach by the police violates international human rights laws and standards. Trust in the police has evaporated and people are afraid, so such an investigation is in the interests of the Hong Kong Administration, too.

We must, of course, acknowledge that some demonstrations have developed a violent edge. Anger has flared into street skirmishes. Innocent people and businesses have been caught up in mob violence and protesters have trashed the world-renowned mass-transit railway—the MTR—and other things that they perceive to be linked to the Chinese mainland.

The escalation can be traced back to the severe police response to what were, initially, peaceful protests. Those protests began from legitimate and peaceful demands for human rights. A million people filled the streets on 9 June alone—and with good reason. The protests were sparked by the extradition bill. As members will be aware, the bill would have meant people being sent to face trial in mainland China, amid fears that the Communist Party would prosecute them for political reasons. The extradition bill has now been formally withdrawn, but the threats to the right to free assembly and freedom of speech still exist.

The anti-mask law has been introduced. People who have been protesting peacefully in the pursuit of universal suffrage have been sprayed with tear gas and arbitrarily arrested. They just want to enjoy the same freedoms as we all enjoy here.

Take Joshua Wong. On Tuesday, that prominent democracy activist was barred from running in the local elections next month. The problem is his political views. Just imagine that, for a moment. That has happened despite his having stated that he does not even support independence for Hong Kong—the apparent cause of his disqualification. Joshua Wong has called that “political screening”. We should be alarmed that the public are being denied the right to channel their concerns through the ballot box.

Protesters want the United Kingdom Government to make a clear and unambiguous statement that the Sino-British joint declaration has been breached, which means that China is now in contravention of international law. Liberal Democrat colleagues have been making that point for some time.

The UK Government says that it is

“fully committed to upholding Hong Kong’s high degree of autonomy and its rights and freedoms as enshrined in the ‘one country, two systems’ framework”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 7 October 2019; Vol 799, c 1903.]

Where, though, is the evidence for that?

Last month, 130 MPs and others called on the UK Government to urge Commonwealth nations to

grant people from Hong Kong citizenship as an insurance policy. Those people include Hong Kong’s last governor, Chris Patten, Ian Blackford of the Scottish National Party and my colleague Alistair Carmichael, who is a patron of Hong Kong Watch, as Paddy Ashdown was before him. Paddy Ashdown campaigned tirelessly for Hong Kong British national (overseas) passport holders to be offered the right to live and work in the UK if China were to renege on the promises that it made during the handover. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that we have now reached that point.

The 1984 Sino-British treaty is, after all, an international agreement that is lodged with the United Nations. It remains in force and it obliges both signatories to adhere to the agreed terms. However, the Chinese foreign ministry has described it as “a historical document” that

“no longer has any practical significance”.

It is important that neither the United Kingdom nor the international community shy away from what is happening in Hong Kong. Beijing has tightened its control over the city, and it was chilling to hear the recent comments of China’s President Xi Jinping while he was visiting Nepal—a message that many people believe was intended for Hong Kong. He said that any attempt to divide China will end in

“bodies smashed and bones ground to powder.”

Nobody, wherever they are and whatever their cause, should talk about other human beings in such hideous and graphic terms. The concerns need to be addressed—not suppressed and silenced.

As one protester told *The Guardian*, this is now about “the soul” of Hong Kong. It is about the future of the principle of one country, two systems. It is about the future of democracy in a place that has the closest of ties with the United Kingdom.

It is time that the Scottish Parliament stood with the people of Hong Kong in support of their rights and freedoms. [*Applause.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I say to members of the public in the gallery that I understand why you wish to applaud, but it is not permitted in Parliament. Only members may applaud.

12:55

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

Hong Kong is a city that is very dear to me, as I have had the pleasure of visiting it on several occasions and it is where a very dear friend, his wife and new son live. I was speaking with my

friend only a couple of hours ago in order to hear from a voice on the ground there, and to hear his reflections on, and experience of, living in Hong Kong, where he has lived for almost five years. The situation is deeply concerning, but I will come to that in a moment.

I will pick up on some of the remarks that Alex Cole-Hamilton made with regard to the 1984 Sino-British joint declaration. I am in complete agreement with Alex Cole-Hamilton's point that it is an international treaty that is lodged at the UN and must be respected. However, we are, to an extent, running up against the cold hard reality of realpolitik. If we are honest in understanding the motivations of that treaty, we see that it was fundamentally a means of achieving the peaceful transition of sovereignty over Hong Kong from Britain to China, and it allowed the UK to save face as the sun finally set on the last remnants of the British empire.

Indeed, UK Government attempts in the negotiations in the 1970s to broker a compromise that would recognise Chinese sovereignty but enable British control were dismissed, and the then Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping made it very clear to the UK Government that there was nothing stopping him from walking across Boundary Street and taking Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, which had, of course, originally been ceded in perpetuity. That is the reality that we face.

There also has to be very keen recognition of the role that Hong Kong plays in the political consciousness of Beijing: it was a symbol and an emblem of the unequal treaties of the mid-19th century. The events in Hong Kong have to be understood in the context of the People's Republic of China as a multi-ethnic and multilingual state, in which there are pressures from other territories for greater autonomy that we understand Beijing is resisting. It is important to establish that context.

We can lend our voices in tracking back to why the People's Republic of China engaged in the joint declaration process in the first place. It was about legitimacy and demonstrating that China was intent on, as it has been characterised, "a peaceful rise", with Hong Kong becoming a part of China peacefully, and with China engaging in international norms and in an international treaty—the 1984 agreement. It is incumbent on us to remind our friends in China of that obligation.

We must also be alive to a key aspect of the relationship between Hong Kong and Beijing: Beijing wants to demonstrate to Taiwan that there is a future for Taiwan as part of the People's Republic of China—that it can be politically incorporated in such a way that it can enjoy a degree of autonomy. If Beijing wants to demonstrate that credibly, it is important that Hong

Kong's special status, at least until 2047, as agreed in the 1984 declaration, be maintained.

It is worth noting where we are with regard to the situation on the ground in Hong Kong, because there are five demands, four of which concern the actions of the police.

The calls for an investigation are vitally important, and it is right that the international community should back those calls—not least because a polity's being able to function requires that it have confidence in the police services, but that has suffered significant damage in recent months. An inquiry would go some way towards addressing such concerns.

One of the final demands, which is for universal suffrage, is more complicated. Although I wish that that could be granted to all the peoples of the world, it is a challenge to see how it could possibly be implemented in Hong Kong in the near future. However, that is an aspiration that I share with the people of Hong Kong.

A slogan that has been appearing on walls in Hong Kong relates to the demands, but another worrying slogan that is appearing on walls and underpasses is "If we burn, you burn". The reflection of my friend in Hong Kong is that a new status quo has emerged: there is peace, calm and order from Monday until Friday afternoon, then the weekend lockdown commences, with restrictions on the mass-transit railway and shops closing earlier. That is having a significant detrimental impact on Hong Kong's economy.

We are aware of the increased vacancy rates in hotels in Hong Kong—now up to 60 per cent—and of the number of tourists who are no longer visiting Hong Kong, but it is also becoming apparent that many people who have chosen to live and work in Hong Kong and who contribute to its being such a dynamic and vibrant international city are considering their options. My friend is reflecting on whether a future in Hong Kong is the best choice for him and his family.

It is vital that we return to a period of stability.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am loth to interrupt, and I am fascinated by the speeches, but I am afraid that you have overrun by two minutes, Mr Arthur. Please make this your last sentence.

Tom Arthur: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for securing today's debate and I hope that we see a return to peace and stability in Hong Kong as soon as possible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Not too many members wish to speak, so I can be a bit freer with other members' time, too. I have been generous with Mr Arthur, so I feel compelled to be so with other members. I see Ms Baillie is giving

me an evil look to ensure that I give her an extra minute. She frightens me sometimes—but not enough.

13:02

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): She frightens us all, Presiding Officer.

Members: Oh!

Donald Cameron: I appreciate the opportunity to speak in the debate, which is on a very serious issue. I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for lodging the motion. It is not often that we are able to discuss international issues in the Parliament, in large part because they are mostly reserved matters, but it remains important that, on occasion, we are able to do so.

The on-going situation in Hong Kong is highly sensitive and of deep concern to us all. I share many of the thoughts already expressed by Alex Cole-Hamilton and Tom Arthur. I was particularly struck by Tom Arthur's speech and his suggestion—a correct one—regarding the legitimacy China sought by agreeing to the 1984 agreement and the fact that the solution to the problem in the future may lie in the past. There is much in that.

Since 1997, Hong Kong has remained a strong ally of the United Kingdom. There is a deep and meaningful connection between both Britain and Hong Kong and Scotland and Hong Kong.

I first visited Hong Kong just prior to the handover in 1997, when the UK Government and the British Army still had a visible and important presence. I have returned since the handover, and although there were some obvious changes, Hong Kong retained its unique and dynamic character as an international hub for business, as well as being a beacon of democratic government in the region. However, it is important to paint a fair picture. It is still one of the most expensive cities in the world and the gap between rich and poor has widened considerably.

Before I entered politics, just after university, I worked at a think tank in Washington DC. From my time there, and from a general interest in the far east, and travelling in the region, I have been acutely conscious of—and we have all been concerned about—China's approach to Hong Kong and the freedoms that Hong Kong residents have enjoyed, in comparison to other cities in China.

The one country, two systems model and framework of 1984, which has been referred to, was agreed to last for 50 years, allowing Hong Kong a degree of autonomy and freedom. I hope that the recent situation will serve to reinforce the principles behind that agreement and timeline.

I welcome that the UK Government has at least reiterated its commitment to that agreement. The Foreign Secretary said explicitly that the UK expects

“China to live up to its obligations under it and, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, to its wider international human rights law obligations, including those in the UN charter.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 26 September 2019; Volume 664, c 863.]

Like many in the chamber, I remain concerned that, at present, the 1984 agreement is being put to the test. I reiterate the need for dialogue and diplomacy on the part of both the UK and Chinese Governments to find a solution.

Some of the protests have been peaceful, but others have not been. There has been a degree of significant violence and mayhem. Others mentioned the police, and there is a real problem in that the hatred that is directed towards the police is very evident. One example of that is the fact that protesters are attacking railway stations in Hong Kong. The railway system has been used to transport the police, meaning that it has become the subject of the ire of protesters. That is a real problem, as a society that loses trust and confidence in its police force is in deep trouble, in not just the short term but the long term. Plainly, the excessive force that has been used by the Hong Kong authorities has not helped. Just as I hope that protesters will conduct themselves peacefully, I urge the Government of Hong Kong to engage in meaningful and peaceful dialogue with protesters.

I welcome the fact that the initial cause of the protests—the extradition bill—has been withdrawn by the Chief Executive of the Government of Hong Kong. The steps that have been taken by that Government to improve the credibility of the Independent Police Complaints Council are also welcome. However, we must be under no illusion—the root cause of the protests is about much more than specific issues of governance. People in Hong Kong, young and old, are concerned about the erosion of their freedoms and liberties. They rightly expect the level of freedom that many of us take for granted, and which should be afforded them under the Chinese-British joint declaration. We must continue to do all that we can to ensure that a peaceful resolution to the situation is eventually achieved.

13:07

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Clearly, I need to practise smiling, because I was giving you my friendly look, Deputy Presiding Officer. To Donald Cameron, I say that I am not remotely frightening—provided, of course, that you agree with me. I would just like to put that on the record.

I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for bringing the debate to the chamber. The issue is close to my heart, and I am encouraged by the level of support that has been received by both the motion and the debate.

I know all too well the close ties that Scotland and Hong Kong have. It was, in fact, merchants from Scotland who first colonised Hong Kong, and the city's streets bear many old Scottish names. Indeed, companies such as Jardine Matheson continue a long association with Hong Kong. I was born in Hong Kong—in Aberdeen, actually—to a Scottish mother and Portuguese father. I spent my formative years there, and all my earliest and happiest memories involve Hong Kong. Its people, landscape and culture are, for me, unique, and its determination to embrace and practise democratic values has gained Hong Kong much-deserved respect around the world. However, I have to say that it is a shame that the British Government waited until very late in the day to bring democracy to Hong Kong and remained content for it to retain its status as a colony, with a governor and limited democracy, for far too long.

Although I will resist taking too much of a walk down memory lane, I remember clearly the debates in my household about the Sino-British joint declaration that came into effect in 1997. There was much debate about China's intentions, but the declaration guaranteed democratic freedoms and recognised human rights for the people of Hong Kong. That was very welcome, and I supported the return of Hong Kong to China. However, the treaty contained important undertakings that

"Hong Kong's previous capitalist system and life-style shall remain unchanged for 50 years."

and that Chinese and Hong Kong law would maintain freedom

"of the person, of speech, of the press,"

and

"of assembly",

to name but a few.

Those principles are critically important. They are the very principles that are under threat due to the actions of the Hong Kong Government and the—frankly—ineffectual leadership of Carrie Lam, its Chief Executive.

I have enormous respect for China, but the reaction to the protests from official representatives and the press has been disappointing, because it is in direct contradiction to the agreements that were laid out in the Sino-British declaration.

Hong Kong and China will of course disagree—they are allowed to do so. However, the

declaration means that China has no right to impose its own policies, including the Chinese penal code or any other Chinese state policy. China is obligated by that binding declaration to respect the principle of the one country, two systems arrangement, which we all passionately believed in, not least because of the economic importance of Hong Kong to China. In the declaration, Hong Kong and its people were granted the power to practice autonomy and China must not forget that.

I have never in my lifetime—some members might unkindly say that I have been around for a while—seen the scale of protests that are taking place on the streets of Hong Kong. I have never seen the Hong Kong police used in the way in which they have been used, frequently resorting to the indiscriminate and unlawful use of non-lethal weapons such as tear gas. They have engaged in a clear pattern of unnecessary and excessive force during the arrests of protesters. That said, I condemn violence on all sides. As parliamentarians, it is right for us to shine a light on the issue and to demand an independent investigation into the allegations of police abuse. The protests have increasingly signalled—to me, at least—a systematic suppression of freedom of speech, as well as a dismissal of the Sino-British joint declaration.

It is not what I expect from China. I sincerely hope that an agreement can be reached so that Hong Kong citizens can continue to enjoy the rights that they deserve.

However, we must not let Britain off the hook, either. The UK Government has legal and moral obligations to the Hong Kong citizens who served in our armed forces and wider obligations to people who live in Hong Kong, and the Government needs to step up.

There is an expression about having an iron fist in a velvet glove, which signals determination to achieve one's ends. I respectfully suggest to the Chinese state that what we need here is less of the iron fist and much more of the velvet glove.

13:12

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am grateful to be able to speak in the debate and I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for bringing the motion to the chamber for debate.

I say to Jackie Baillie that the only thing that I am intimidated by is following in a debate such as this someone who clearly has a deep personal connection to the issues that are being discussed. I am sure that the sincerity and depth of feeling in Jackie Baillie's speech is respected by everybody in the chamber.

A number of members began by placing the issue in its historical context, and it is right to do so. The motion reflects the legal and moral duty that the UK has to the people of Hong Kong, and it is worth remembering where that duty originates. It originates in some of the most repulsive and abusive actions in the shameful history of British colonialism and with the use of military and economic force to make Indian farmers grow opium to export to China, merely to achieve an economic benefit. The huge social, economic and personal cost that played out from that—including two wars, the end of which resulted in the UK's claim of ownership of Hong Kong—cannot be overestimated.

As the inheritors of that moral responsibility, the only legitimate way that we can put right the wrongs that were committed by UK imperialism and colonialism is to ensure that the people who are left behind gain control over their own lives. Transfer to democratic institutions is the only legitimate way to respond to the moral responsibility that we have as a result of the act of colonialism. That responsibility needs to recognise the place of democracy in the future of the people of Hong Kong and not just for the decades covered by the treaty.

On the use of violence, states need to be held to a higher standard. I think that we all recognise that there have been times when people struggling against antidemocratic forces and autocratic and dictatorial regimes have needed to resort to violence. States should be held to a higher standard, however.

How does that responsibility play out in relation to Scotland, given that we are not the UK or the legal entity that is party to the treaty? We have issues that we need to take seriously in terms of our own responsibility, because the tear gas used against civilian protesters, to which members have referred, includes tear gas manufactured by arms companies that have received funding from the Scottish Government. Chemring—

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The member might not have been in the chamber on 26 June when I made it clear that the Stevenson plant of Chemring Energetics UK, which has received funding in order to sustain permanent jobs in North Ayrshire, does not produce tear gas.

Patrick Harvie: I did not refer to a plant that produces tear gas; I referred to a company that produces tear gas. Chemring, which recently touted its wares at the arms fair in London, is responsible in that regard. If we seek to fund for any other purposes companies that are responsible for the production and export of munitions that are used against civilian protesters in the way that we have seen, we bear the

responsibility for that use. Work done by *The Ferret* and my colleague Ross Greer has shown that the Scottish Government's usual response that it does not fund the production of munitions simply does not stand up. A recent grant application by Chemring drew attention to munitions as "a key growth area" for the company. There needs to be a higher degree of scrutiny and responsibility in such a case.

In general, the Scottish Government states that it is willing to support civilian sectors, including what it calls the "blue light sector", but that is a euphemism that is intended to put us in mind of fire engines and ambulances. The blue light sector clearly includes police forces that use weapons, as the Hong Kong Police Force does. We should hold ourselves to a higher standard and public money should not go to any company involved in the arms trade. However, if the Scottish Government wants to maintain that option, it should redefine its approach to the blue light sector so that authoritarian police forces into whose hands munitions will be put are not provided with any support or funding on the Scottish taxpayer's account.

12:18

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): It is always somewhat hazardous to speak towards the end of a debate like this, because the things that we want to say have invariably been said by other members—and possibly in a more effective and powerful way than we ourselves could muster.

Nonetheless, I, too, begin by thanking Alex Cole-Hamilton for bringing the debate to the chamber—particularly because Hong Kong is a place that is close to my heart, too. My wife was born and brought up in Hong Kong—she is half Chinese—and we talk regularly at home about Hong Kong to ensure that our daughters, both of whom have Chinese middle names, are aware of their cultural background and heritage.

Over the past few months, it has been hugely worrying for us to receive reports from friends and family who are still in Hong Kong about what they are facing. They have genuine personal worries about their immediate safety as they wander the streets: many people simply will not venture out at night. Previously, that would have been unthinkable in Hong Kong, which was thought of as a very safe city. More important is that they have worries about their future in Hong Kong.

The fact is that, for months, millions of people have been taking to the streets in a territory whose population is not much bigger than Scotland's. It is a huge worry that matters have escalated. That has undoubtedly been provoked by the police's

heavy-handed response, which has turned a peaceful and orderly process into something violent. That has worrying implications for Hong Kong and for the future of China.

Other members have rightly focused on the history of Britain in Hong Kong and on the opium wars, and have talked about the deep historical links between Scotland and Hong Kong. It is important to highlight the direct link between the opium wars and Scots in Hong Kong. Jardine and Matheson have been mentioned. Those two Scottish individuals directly sought and brought about the opium wars. UK imperialism is a legacy of which we must all be mindful and take ownership of. That heritage belongs as much to Scots as it does to other people in the United Kingdom.

It was very late in the day—at the 11th hour—that the UK Administration in Hong Kong extended the franchise. Nonetheless, democracy is much bigger than simply holding elections. Democracy is about accountability, transparency, freedom of expression and the rule of law. Although we did not implement democracy in Hong Kong as fully as we should have, those principles are entrenched in Hong Kong and are at the very heart of the Sino-British joint declaration of 1984.

Members have rightly said that we need to return to those principles, because they are important not just for the future of Hong Kong, but for the future of China. Over the past 30 years, since the Sino-British joint declaration, China has changed beyond all recognition. I argue that that is in no small part because of the 1984 declaration. Hong Kong opened a window to the world for China; it gave it access to the global stage. China benefited as much from the things that had been established in Hong Kong as it did simply from having additional territory.

I ask China, bearing in mind the historical context that we have laid out, to think very carefully before it breaks the principles. Above all else, it must embark on dialogue. Alex Cole-Hamilton was right to emphasise that we must have an inquiry into the Hong Kong police's actions. However, we have to go further—there must be a serious concerted effort by the Hong Kong and Chinese authorities to have dialogue in order to seek a way forward that has broad popular support, because that is, ultimately, what democracy means.

I implore the Hong Kong authorities to engage in talks. We ask China to listen. We ask the UK Government to remind China gently and respectfully about the principles that both Governments signed up to in 1984.

13:23

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I welcome the debate and thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for lodging the motion on the current situation in Hong Kong. I also thank other colleagues for their considered contributions. I pay particular tribute to Jackie Baillie for her personal reflection and considered political analysis.

I will take the points of the motion in order. The Scottish Government is seriously concerned about the situation in Hong Kong and the recent violent clashes between protesters and the police. It is clear that political dialogue is the only way to resolve the situation, so we urge all communities to engage in good faith in order to achieve a peaceful resolution. We welcome the Chief Executive of Hong Kong's announcement of the withdrawal of the extradition bill, and we welcome the initial steps towards dialogue, which must continue.

On the close ties between Scotland and Hong Kong, the motion is right to recall

“the long and close ties between Scotland and Hong Kong, which are evident throughout the territory”.

Those ties go back for many, many generations. As we have heard, they can be seen in place names, such as Aberdeen harbour, in the thistle of Jardine Matheson's emblem and, of course, in the presence of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, which was founded in 1864 by Thomas Sutherland, who was from north-east Scotland. The debate has reflected on that imperial heritage; we should be conscious of it.

Contemporary ties between Scotland and Hong Kong are also strong—in education, business, tourism and culture. For example, in 2017, Scotland's exports to Hong Kong of goods and services, excluding oil and gas, were worth £255 million, which was 15 per cent higher than they were in the previous year. Also, there are 930 students from Hong Kong studying at higher education institutions in Scotland.

As we heard from Tom Arthur, Jackie Baillie and Daniel Johnson, many connections are of family and friendship. I, too, have family in Hong Kong; a number of members from across the chamber have such connections. I was interested to hear members' personal reflections, particularly those of Tom Arthur and Jackie Baillie, on their experiences and connections. We all want a strong, stable and prosperous Hong Kong.

On human rights currently being under threat, as I set out in my answer to a parliamentary question on 27 June,

“the Scottish Government's position ... is that it is vital that Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and the rights and freedoms”

that are set out in the legally binding Sino-British joint declaration, which is registered with the UN,

“are respected in full.” —[*Official Report*, 27 June 2019; c 3.]

That is the best way to ensure that the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong are upheld.

On our experience at home, we aspire for Scotland to act as a good global citizen in order to promote tolerance and respect for human rights in other countries. We want to ensure that our commitment to securing democracy, the rule of law and human rights all around the world is communicated, and we expect China to fulfil its human rights obligations with respect to Hong Kong.

Alex Cole-Hamilton mentioned the right to stand for political office. The right to stand for election is a fundamental right that is enshrined in “The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China” and the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance. That right should be fully respected, and I am concerned that it is not.

We fully support the right to peaceful protest that has been exercised by the majority of protestors over many months. There is no excuse for violence, so we condemn the minority of hardcore protestors who insist on using violence. However, it is vital that the police’s response be proportionate. We have heard concerns about that from a number of members.

On calls for a full independent investigation into the reported police violence, there must be a robust, credible and independent investigation into events. An inquiry into reported police violence would be an important step towards healing divisions and rebuilding trust, which will support the process of dialogue and resolution.

On the UK’s legal and moral duty to the people of Hong Kong, and to support for their rights, freedoms and genuine democracy, I reaffirm the Scottish Government’s support for the one country, two systems legal framework, which is guaranteed by the legally binding joint declaration of 1984, and enshrined in Hong Kong’s basic law. We urge the UK Government to continue to assert its strong commitment to that agreement. As we heard from Jackie Baillie, the Chinese Government should also discharge its responsibilities. Tom Arthur and Donald Cameron mentioned the issue; Donald Cameron also made the point that the framework was meant to last for 50 years and is still within that period.

As I set out in answer to a parliamentary question on 27 June, the Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation has written to the

Chinese consul general outlining the Scottish Government’s position.

I finish by restating the Scottish Government’s view—that the way forward must be found through constructive and meaningful dialogue by both sides to address the concerns of the people of Hong Kong.

We welcome the Chief Executive of Hong Kong’s announcement of withdrawal of the extradition bill and we welcome the initial steps towards dialogue. However, the dialogue must be structured and transparent. In order to successfully bring about a peaceful resolution, it must take on broad views, allow wide engagement and listen to the concerns of the people of Hong Kong. That is the only way to resolve the situation and to ensure that Hong Kong’s stability and prosperity endure.

The debate has been thoughtful, and it is timely. Our message must be one of solidarity with the people of Hong Kong: we offer them our best wishes for a stable and secure future. In order to secure that, a great deal of responsibility lies on the shoulders of the Chinese and UK Governments.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank members for their thoughtful and interesting contributions.

13:29

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Social Security and Older People

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is portfolio question time. I will try to get as many members in as possible, so please be succinct.

Disability Assistance and Carers Allowance (Loneliness and Social Isolation)

1. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what changes it will make to disability assistance and carers allowance to help reduce loneliness and social isolation. (S5O-03685)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Disability and carers assistance will help disabled people and carers to access life opportunities and will reduce barriers to their participation in social activities and relationships. As outlined in “A Connected Scotland: Our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections”, we know that interaction with others is key to reducing the harmful impacts of social isolation and loneliness. That is why the Scottish Government recognises that social security payments are an investment in people’s wellbeing and provide them with the financial support to make vital connections with others.

David Stewart: At present, unpaid carers for disabled people travel for free when they are in the company of the person whom they care for. Crucially, however, the companion element of the concessionary travel scheme does not assist with the solo travel costs of, for example, collecting prescriptions, doing shopping or visiting the cared-for person in hospital. According to Carers Scotland, one third of Scotland’s unpaid carers struggle to make ends meet, and many cut back on leisure and social activities to cope with the cost of caring. Will the Scottish Government detail the work that it has done in exploring the idea of concessionary travel for carers?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will ask my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, who has responsibility for the concessionary travel scheme, to write to David Stewart directly on what is being looked at in that respect.

I recognise the contribution that carers make to our society. That is why the first act of our new agency, Social Security Scotland, was the

implementation of the carers allowance supplement, which, last year, put an extra £442 into the pockets of carers, in recognition of the very important role that they have.

Devolved Benefits (Implementation)

2. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what formal assessment Social Security Scotland made over the summer of the implementation of wave 1 and 2 devolved benefits. (S5O-03686)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Further assessment of the implementation timetable for the devolved benefits, as a result of the introduction of the Scottish child payment, was undertaken over the summer jointly by officials in the Government’s social security programme and Social Security Scotland. The outcome of that assessment was provided to the Social Security Committee in a letter on 4 October, a copy of which is available on the committee’s website. The Scottish child payment position paper, which is available on the Scottish Government’s website, has also been updated to reflect the most recent assessment, and it sets out next steps.

Alexander Stewart: In a ministerial statement back in June, Aileen Campbell stated:

“Over the summer, officials will carry out further formal assessment of the challenges and develop a clear plan for how to mitigate”

in regard to

“information technology systems, staffing, supplier management and our enabling services”—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2019; c 44-45.]

at Social Security Scotland. Will the Scottish Government publish the findings in those four areas and update Parliament?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I said in my original answer, we published the findings of the assessments on 4 October, when we confirmed that we will hold to the programme that my colleague Aileen Campbell set out. That information is already available and was given to the Social Security Committee.

Equality Act 2010 (Single-sex Exemptions)

3. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it supports the Equality Act 2010’s single-sex exemptions that allow for women-only spaces and services based on biological sex when this is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. (S5O-03687)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Scottish Government does of course support the appropriate use of the single-sex exemptions

by service providers. That requires a case-by-case approach to determine what is legitimate and proportionate in any given circumstance. There is a requirement on all of us to be precise in the words that we use in this complex area and members will want to note that “biological sex” is not a term that is used in the Equality Act 2010.

Joan McAlpine: Does the cabinet secretary agree that, notwithstanding any current practice, the genuine occupational requirement in the Equality Act 2010 allows a Rape Crisis centre to ensure that its trauma counsellors are biological women, so that no female rape survivor is further distressed by encountering a male voice on a helpline or a male body in a shelter when she reaches out for help?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I can confirm that a specific provision in the 2010 act provides for the option to restrict the employment of a person in a specific role on the basis of whether or not that person has “a particular protected characteristic”. Employers can do that where that is a genuine occupational requirement and where applying the requirement is

“a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim”.

My experience is that organisations of the type referred to are run by dedicated and caring staff and volunteers who have become highly skilled in meeting the needs of vulnerable women and girls over many years. I would expect them to act appropriately and lawfully and to use whichever of the various provisions in the 2010 act they believe necessary in order to deliver services in the best interests of the women for whom they so tirelessly work.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are two supplementaries.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the 2010 act is right to allow competitive sport to be organised on the basis of sex when

“physical strength, stamina or physique”

are major factors in determining success or failure?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The member rightly points to the 2010 act having provisions on sport. Nothing that the Scottish Government is doing or considering would suggest any changes to the exemptions that are already in the 2010 act.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I hope that we would all support careful case-by-case exemptions that are well evidenced and have a legitimate aim. However, we are also conscious that the debate is being had in a context in which some people—I hope not in this chamber—simply do not accept the reality of trans people’s lives.

They do not accept that trans women are women or that trans men are men. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if we were to listen to those arguments and reach a position where trans men had to use women’s spaces, facilities and services and trans women had to use men’s spaces, facilities and services, that would be wrong, discriminatory and unsafe, and that it will not happen in Scotland?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Patrick Harvie rightly points out the responsibility that we all have to have that debate, in particular, in a way that respects everybody’s rights. It is certainly my intention and that of the Government to do just that. The Equality and Human Rights Commission’s statutory code of practice for service providers, for example, is clear that, in respect of a single-sex service, the service provider should treat a trans man or a trans woman according to the gender in which they present, unless there are strong reasons to the contrary.

Older People (Inverclyde)

4. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to help the increasing number of older people in Inverclyde. (S50-03688)

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): The Scottish Government supports all older people across Scotland. On 3 April this year, we published “A Fairer Scotland for Older People: A Framework for Action”, which not only highlights the contribution that older people make, but tackles the barriers that they face and the negative perceptions and unfounded stereotypes that are associated with ageing.

Most important, the framework has the voice and the influence of older people at its heart. It draws together a range of work that the Scottish Government is carrying out for older people across many areas, including, but not limited to, employment, housing, health and social care and financial security. We will monitor the progress of the framework and produce an annual report in April 2020.

Stuart McMillan: The minister will be aware that more than one in five Inverclyde residents are aged over 65 and that, year on year, Inverclyde’s population is declining. In addition, over the past 20 years, the 25 to 44 age group in Inverclyde has declined by more than 30 per cent while the over-75s group has increased by more than 20 per cent. What further support can the Scottish Government give to Inverclyde Council to attract people of working age to live and work in the area to ensure that our community is sustainable over the coming years? Will the minister accept an

invitation to visit one of our older organisations in Inverclyde?

Christina McKelvie: I will deal with the invitation first. I will be delighted to come along to one of the “older organisations”—or perhaps one of the organisations for older people—in Inverclyde.

Stuart McMillan is absolutely right. We need to be mindful of the fact that we are an ageing population and that we need to grow the population not only in Inverclyde but throughout Scotland to ensure that we have a sustainable and vibrant community and drive improvements in inclusive growth. That includes encouraging European Union nationals to stay in Scotland. Criticising the ending of freedom of movement and having control over our own immigration system in Scotland would be helpful.

The Scottish Government has therefore established a cross-portfolio ministerial population task force to identify work to take forward across Government to address population decline and intensify our efforts where necessary to deal with the very issues that Stuart McMillan has raised.

Scottish Child Payment

5. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many parents will cease to receive the Scottish child payment each year for a child who reaches 16 while still in full-time education. (S5O-03689)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Each year, around 20,000 families in receipt of the Scottish child payment could have a qualifying young person in education or approved training turn 16. Scotland has a range of support for young people that is not available elsewhere in the United Kingdom—for example, we have protected the education maintenance allowance, which was abolished in England. That provides financial support to 16 to 19-year-olds from low-income households who are attending non-advanced learning in school or college or fulfilling a learning agreement with their local authority.

Iain Gray: In East Lothian, almost 600 young people who might be eligible for that payment will turn 16 in 2023. Virtually all of them will still be in school, but their families will lose that support. Another 1,000 East Lothian children could lose entitlement in 2021 and 2022 simply because they will turn six years old and the Scottish Government cannot get the full scheme in place until 2022.

The Scottish Government is botching the design and implementation of that important benefit. My constituents were the first in Scotland to face the full impact of the volatility and cliff edges of universal credit, and they really do not need any

more of the same, courtesy of the Scottish Government. At the very least, if the Scottish Government gets the data that it requires from the Department for Work and Pensions, will it guarantee that payments will continue for six-year-olds in 2021 and 2022?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That question underlines Iain Gray’s absolute lack of understanding of what the Scottish Government is delivering. We have committed to delivering the Scottish child payment, and we are doing so early. We are delivering the under-sixes payments even earlier than that.

Delivering a benefit in around 18 months is unprecedented not just in Scotland but in the rest of the UK. We are developing it early because we are replicating the functionality of the best start grant. If Mr Gray is suggesting that we should do something more complex than what we can do under the best start grant, that would simply ensure that it would not be possible for us to deliver the Scottish child payment in the timeframe that we have.

Rather than blaming the Scottish Government, which is working within the powers that it has, perhaps we could work together to reflect on the fact that the Scottish Government currently does not have the data to allow us to be able to apply that to the over-sixes. Why do we not work together and ask the UK Government to get that data? If that is possible, we will have to consider whether things can be done within the timeframe so that there is not an impact on disability assistance.

We will work hard to get the data as quickly as possible. I have already asked the new secretary of state about that, and I will do so again when we meet, I hope, in a couple of weeks’ time. If that is possible, we have to be frank about whether things can be done in the timeframe that we have and whether there are other implications. I am sure that Mr Gray would not want any delay to disability assistance.

If Scottish Labour is genuinely interested in eradicating child poverty, it will work with the Scottish Government to ensure that we have the powers here to do that properly.

Social Security Benefits (Two-child Cap)

6. James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to alleviate the impact of the two-child cap on social security benefits in Scotland. (S5O-03690)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Unlike the United Kingdom Government’s social security system, our social security system does not have, and will never have, a cap on the

number of eligible children in a family who can receive support through our new benefits to help low-income families, which include the three best start grants, best start foods, the Scottish child payment and the council tax reduction scheme. The Scottish Government will continue to oppose that UK Government policy, including its appalling rape clause. That is another reason why all social security powers should be delivered to Scotland.

James Kelly: The Tory two-child cap is an abhorrent policy, restricting payments to families on the birth of a third child and treating those families with total contempt and disrespect. Does the minister agree that the forthcoming general election presents an opportunity, with the election of a Labour Government, to scrap universal credit and put in place a social security system that treats all with dignity and respect?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The next UK election, and every other UK election after that, raises the threat that the people of Scotland will be subjected to another Tory Government, whether that is next time round or the time after that. That is exactly why we need to have the powers up here in Scotland and to be free from the threat of a Tory Government, at this election or any other election in the future. We can ensure that only through independence.

Fraud Mitigation

7. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps Social Security Scotland has taken to mitigate the risk of fraud. (S5O-03691)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Social Security Scotland has effective fraud prevention measures in place, delivered through robust systems and procedures. The measures are detailed in our published counter-fraud strategy. Fraud risk assessments are carried out before the implementation of any benefit, with prevention and detection embedded in the system at design stage.

The risks that Social Security Scotland faces will evolve over time and in line with the different types of benefits delivered. Control systems will be continually developed to respond to evolving risks, protecting our benefits from those who intentionally seek to misuse them while contributing to an economic, efficient and effective system.

As I said, Social Security Scotland has effective fraud prevention, delivered through robust systems and procedures, as is detailed in the counter-fraud strategy.

Liam Kerr: Audit Scotland seems to take a different view. It warns:

“The agency does not yet have an approach to estimating error and fraud levels for the benefits it delivers and for those it will become responsible for”.

As more complex benefits start to be delivered by Social Security Scotland, surely that will become a matter of urgency. When does the minister expect to have sufficiently addressed the concerns that have been raised by Audit Scotland?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I hope to reassure the member that we absolutely have the systems in place to analyse and detect fraud for the benefits that exist at this time. Audit Scotland did not identify or report any loss as a result of our not having the current regulations in place. The work that is already being undertaken on fraud is going well.

We are developing social security on an incremental basis. Therefore, the requirements of the benefits that we have at the moment are very different from what will be required when we move to wave 2, for the continuous payments for disability assessment. Just as we move forward with everything else in social security, we will build what is required for the benefits that are available. I am absolutely confident, and the agency is absolutely confident, that what we have in place is relevant for wave 1, and that what we will have in place for wave 2 will be stringent regarding fraud and error—importantly, it will also deliver the benefits that people require and are eligible for throughout Scotland.

Social Security Experience Panels (South Scotland)

8. Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many carer and disability benefit recipients in the South Scotland region participate in the social security experience panels. (S5O-03692)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Social security experience panels involve people with lived experience of the benefits system. Two hundred and forty-seven current panel members have addresses in the South Scotland region. That is 11 per cent of current panel members, which compares with the 12.5 per cent of the Scottish population who live in the South Scotland region. Recruitment is open to new panel members, and I would encourage anyone with relevant experience in the south of Scotland, or indeed anywhere else in the country, to take up the opportunity to shape a social security system that is based on dignity, fairness and respect.

Colin Smyth: Just before the recess, the cabinet secretary told the Social Security Committee that experience panels are not being consulted on the Government’s plan to use the

consumer prices index for annual uprating. The CPI is set 1.7 per cent lower than the rise in wages, which is twice the rate of inflation. Have the experience panels, which are vital to the co-production approach that the Parliament debated on Tuesday, been asked whether they think that the uprating proposals are fair?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We carried out a consultation on the uprating procedure. As I discussed with the Social Security Committee, the conclusion that the consultation came to was that we have used, and will continue to use, the most relevant and up-to-date measure of inflation, as experts, such as the Bank of England, suggest that organisations use. We will continue to use the most useful national statistics, as we have done this year.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio question time on social security and older people. Before we move on, I remind members that, if they have a question in a portfolio question time slot, it is a courtesy to the chamber for them to be here for the entirety of that slot.

European Union Farming Funding (Convergence Funds)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a statement by Fergus Ewing on allocating convergence funding to Scottish farmers and crofters. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:51

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): Following a six-year campaign, and continued pressure by successive Scottish ministers and key farming and crofting organisations, Scotland is getting its convergence funding at last. Since I became rural economy secretary in 2016, I have pressed relentlessly for the issue to be resolved. I am therefore delighted with the long-awaited outcome.

The review that was set up under Lord Bew, with Scotland's interests being represented by Jim Walker, made the difference. I thank Lord Bew for his diligence and for listening to Scotland's case. Of course, I also thank Jim Walker, who was relentless, forensic and persuasive. He has played a key role in our success and we should all thank him for his work.

I also thank all members across the chamber—in this parliamentary session and the previous session—for their continued support to achieve this result. Finally, I should—and I will—acknowledge the commitment made by the Prime Minister to “right this historic wrong”. It would be churlish not to do so.

The background to this long-standing issue will be familiar to most members, but perhaps not to everyone who is listening. In 2013, as part of the most recent common agricultural policy reform, the European Union set out to redistribute direct payments more equally, based on average euros per hectare. The intention was that member states that were receiving less than 90 per cent of the EU average rate per hectare would close the gap by one third by 2019, and achieve a minimum rate of at least €196 per hectare. More important, the United Kingdom qualified for such an uplift only because Scotland's extremely low average rate per hectare reduced the UK average per hectare rate to below the EU's 90 per cent threshold. Without Scotland, the UK would not have qualified or received an additional €223 million—around £190 million—from the EU over a six-year period. Without Scotland, the UK would have received nothing. Despite that, the UK Government failed to return the money to Scotland, to those recipients for whom it was intended. Instead, the uplift was

distributed across the UK, with Scotland receiving only just over 16 per cent, or £30 million, which was far below what was due.

At last, we can now put matters right. The UK Treasury has confirmed that one half of the £160 million—an initial £80 million—in convergence moneys will be made available to the Scottish Government in this financial year. That was at our request, to allow farmers and crofters to be paid as quickly and as efficiently as possible. I therefore confirm that the first instalment of £80 million will be paid to active farmers and crofters by the end of March 2020. It is also my intention to allocate the remaining £80 million by the end of March 2021, and I will confirm arrangements for that once the funding is delivered by the UK Government.

I have already made clear that the convergence moneys will be ring fenced for agriculture and land management. The approach I am taking to allocating the funding is founded on two core propositions. First, I take seriously my responsibility to arrive at the fairest and best decision that is true to the principles of convergence. Secondly, this funding should most help those who need help the most—those who farm on our marginal land. Accordingly, I asked Government officials to model an approach to deliver on those two principles. Other key considerations were activity, timeliness and deliverability.

I have determined that the moneys will support active farmers and crofters who currently receive CAP basic payments. There will of course be some in the industry who have retired or whose farm businesses have changed since 2014. If we were to include them, we would have to trace them through the system, calculate what they might be due and do so for each year since 2015. That would inevitably hold up making payments to any farmer or crofter.

I consider it important to get the funds paid as quickly as possible to active farmers and crofters through a process that is simple to deliver and makes it simple for them to receive the money. We will therefore use the current CAP architecture, data and activity rules without requiring farmers and crofters to apply for the funds. We could have come up with a complex system with more targeted payments and conditions, but that would have taken much time to design. It would have required farmers to apply and be assessed, to wait to know the outcome, and ultimately wait to be paid.

Farmers and crofters in Scotland have waited long enough. My key consideration is ensuring that those farmers who need support the most receive most of the funding. I will therefore also use those funds to deliver on my commitment to

do everything possible to avoid a reduction in overall funding to the less favoured areas.

The approach that I have set out ensures that the funding will go to where it was originally intended to go. The document that I have shared with members of the Scottish Parliament to support this statement sets out how that approach delivers on those core propositions and seeks to provide helpful clarity and transparency about how the funds will be deployed.

The first tranche of funding will be entirely in the form of a direct payment to active farmers and crofters and a significant proportion will be a standalone area-based income support payment comprising two elements. The first element will be based on the existing basic payment scheme regions, with an approach that respects the principles of convergence.

The second element of the single payment will ensure that my commitment to maintain funding in the less favoured areas is met. There is no doubt that the current uncertainty around Brexit and its impact on farming is taking its toll, not least on our beef sector. There are undoubtedly long-term issues to resolve in the sector to make producing beef a profitable and sustainable enterprise, but we also need to help the sector in the short term. So I will also use the convergence funding to make an additional payment under the existing voluntary coupled support schemes and I will set out more detail on how that will be achieved in due course.

I am aware that others have promoted a different approach. I want to assure members that I have considered those carefully, but I have concluded that the approach that I have chosen achieves both the intent and the purpose of convergence. There is no doubt that this one-off, lump sum payment will come at an important time—a wealth of evidence indicates that Scotland's farmers and crofters would be worse off under every Brexit scenario. I hope that the payment will provide some mitigation of the disruption caused by the threat, and potential reality, of leaving the EU. I hope, too, that it provides Scotland's farmers and crofters with more evidence of the Scottish Government's willingness to do all that it can to support them through hard times.

There is more work to do. I appreciate that members may have questions about the details of the approach, which I may not be able to answer fully today—although I will do my best.

The accompanying document will help in that regard, and I am, of course, happy to update Parliament as more details become available. However, today is about marking a victory for Scottish farming and crofting—money that they

are due is, at last, being repatriated. I am glad that we are getting on with getting the funding allocated as quickly as we can.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement, for which I will allow no more than 20 minutes. It would be helpful if those who wish to ask a question would press their request-to-speak buttons.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): I declare an interest as a partner in a family business and as a member of NFU Scotland. I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of his statement. We all celebrated the successful campaign by our Conservative MPs to repatriate the £160 million from Westminster. [*Interruption.*]

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Steady, Mr Lyle.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): That is a good one, Peter.

Peter Chapman: It is absolutely genuine.

I also applaud the fact that the £80 million has been delivered to Scotland much earlier than expected. It is, indeed, good to get some extra money out to our hard-working farmers. However, I am deeply concerned that an announcement as to how the money is to be spent was made to the press, and not to Parliament. On Tuesday, there was no ministerial statement on the order paper, and we had to push hard for today's statement. It is totally unacceptable to have to drag ministers to the chamber to answer questions.

More worrying still is how the cabinet secretary is planning to share out the money. My understanding is that most of the money will go to regions 2 and 3. It appears that the cabinet secretary does not realise that Orkney, Tiree and Bute—to name but three areas—are predominantly region 1 land, with 1.6 million hectares of region 1 land, two thirds of which are growing grass and supporting livestock. Has he learnt nothing about the crisis in our beef industry?

A further serious allegation surrounding the announcement is the fact that the money has been used to replace £13.1 million that was taken from the less favoured area support scheme budget.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Come to your question, please.

Peter Chapman: That is money that the Scottish Government received, and which has now been disgracefully raided by Derek Mackay for other purposes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Come to your question, please.

Peter Chapman: How can Fergus Ewing possibly try to promote the idea that he is a benevolent uncle while at the same time stealing money from farmers' pockets?

Fergus Ewing: What I have announced today is funding of the first tranche of £80 million for the farmers and crofters in Scotland, the majority of which funding will benefit those who farm marginal land. That is exactly what Lord Bew recommended, it is exactly what the money was intended to achieve in the first place, and it is exactly what we will do.

As far as the less favoured area support scheme is concerned, I made it absolutely clear that I would do everything that I possibly could to maintain LFASS income. Although I do not know whether Mr Chapman was listening at the time, I stated in Parliament that convergence funding would be used for that purpose, and I made it clear during a recent meeting with the NFUS. I have delivered on our promise.

I finish by saying to Mr Chapman that it has taken six years, since 2013, for the United Kingdom Conservative Government and its colleagues here in Scotland to be shamed into admitting that what it did—[*Interruption.*] Even now, the Conservatives do not seem to accept it; however, what the UK Government did in 2013 was a shameful injustice. It admitted that. The Prime Minister said that it was a historic injustice, and it took six years for the UK Government to be shamed into agreeing to pay that money back. By contrast, it has taken us just over six weeks to come up with a system to get that money out of the door, and to get it done. I think that Scottish farmers and crofters will notice that contrast.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Labour has long supported calls for the convergence funding to be fully allocated to Scotland. As such, we welcome the outcome of the review by Lord Bew, and thank all those who delivered the funding.

We also welcome the fact that the Government has now set out proposals on how to allocate the funding or, rather, part of the funding. However, I share the concerns about that being in the form of a press release at one minute past midnight on Tuesday morning, rather than to Parliament. Members have had to request today's statement, which was given to members to read only a short time ago during portfolio question time.

As the cabinet secretary said in his statement, stakeholders such as NFUS and the Scottish Crofting Federation had a range of views on how the funding should be allocated. The one thing that united all the stakeholders and every Opposition party in this chamber was the view that the funding should not be used to plug the gap in LFASS or be

siphoned off to deliver commitments that the cabinet secretary made but which he had no funds to back up. However, that is exactly what he has done and, in doing so, he has ignored the views of Scotland's farmers and crofters.

However the cabinet secretary allocates the funding—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you come to your question, please?

Colin Smyth: The long-term future of farming needs to be addressed, so when does the cabinet secretary expect to set out in detail the long-term plans to properly fund agriculture, and to allocate the funds that are needed to make necessary changes in the future?

Fergus Ewing: I respectfully disagree with Colin Smyth's opening remarks. I made it absolutely clear in response to Mr Chapman that I am delivering not only what I promised, but far more and to a far greater extent, which I think is accepted. I do not accept the characterisation of the views of stakeholders that Mr Smyth presented.

On Mr Smyth's question about long-term issues, as members know, in the motion that Parliament passed in January, as amended by Mr Rumbles, the Government was asked to set up an advisory group to advise on precisely those matters. We have done that. The group first met at the Royal Highland Show and it has met subsequently. It is doing that work and it will report, through me, to Parliament in due course.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Front benchers are given quite a long time to ask their questions. However, on this occasion, both have gone well over that time, which disadvantages their colleagues.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I congratulate the cabinet secretary on refusing to give up and succeeding and on shaming the Tories into righting that wrong. It is a windfall for farmers and crofters that many had given up on ever receiving. When they receive their payments, will there be conditions attached regarding how they are spent?

Fergus Ewing: Under our approach, the first £80 million instalment will be paid to eligible farmers and crofters by the end of March next year. Officials are working hard to start making payments as soon as practically possible. There will be no conditions attached regarding what farmers can spend the money on. Farmers and crofters will be able to utilise the money not only by investing in their own farms and crofts, but, where appropriate, by reducing any debt that they have, which I know is a serious problem for some

in the sector. It will make a substantial contribution to both groups.

Edward Mountain: I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

Before I ask my question, I must raise the issue of why the cabinet secretary thinks that releasing information to the press before giving it to Parliament is the right way to do things. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members are asking you to raise your microphone, Mr Mountain. They are obviously desperate to hear you.

Edward Mountain: Sorry. You put me under so much pressure, Presiding Officer.

On convergence payments and where they went, the cabinet secretary said that that was "a scandalous act" and nothing more than a "great rural robbery", yet he is doing that again now. He is taking £13 million out of the money that should have gone to farmers to top up the LFASS pot, which the Government raided. Would it not be fairer for the Government to pay that back to the farmers first, and then pay the rest of the money to farmers as allocated?

Fergus Ewing: I completely reject that assertion. There is no evidence whatsoever to back it up. I will leave it at that.

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): It is absolutely laughable that the Tories are trying to claim any glory from the situation, but there we are.

Farmers in my constituency and I welcome the approach that the cabinet secretary has set out. Will he explain why he decided not to adopt the approach that was promoted by NFU Scotland?

Fergus Ewing: I was pleased to meet and discuss the matter with the NFUS. There are several grounds of commonality, because both the NFUS and I felt that active farmers and crofters should benefit, that each approach has advantages and disadvantages and that the money should be paid out as quickly as possible.

However, I disagreed with the NFUS's view that more money should be paid out to region 1 components, because I felt that more money should be paid out to region 2 and 3 components. We respectfully disagree about that.

I have already agreed to meet the chairman of the NFUS LFASS committee and his members as soon as possible. I think that those further discussions will be fruitful, because I profoundly believe that the modelling and methodology that we have based our core principles on are in accordance with the convergence principles and will benefit those whom it was intended to benefit most.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I agree with other members that the money should not be used to plug the LFASS gap. The money was given to the UK because our Scottish farmers and crofters receive less than 90 per cent of the EU average rate per hectare, and the money was intended to close that gap. Can the cabinet secretary tell me how many Scottish farmers and crofters will still receive less than 90 per cent of the EU average and how many of those to whom he is giving additional funding already receive in excess of that amount?

Fergus Ewing: The table that has been provided to members shows an analysis of the average figures that apply; it is not possible to show individual figures. However, under the proposals, all farmers in Scotland will benefit. The information has been provided to members so that they have as much information as possible before them.

As far as the LFASS gap is concerned, the position was set by Europe. Members will recall that, following a consultation in 2016, it was agreed between stakeholders and ministers that, in the short term, the best option to provide stability for crofts in our constrained areas was to retain LFASS and that moving to an areas facing natural constraint scheme would result in redesignation of our constrained areas, which would have resulted in the redistribution of funding across Scotland. That was perhaps why stakeholders and ministers agreed not to proceed in that way in 2016.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of the document. This is, indeed, a victory for Scotland's crofters and farmers, and people are to be congratulated on that, including repentant sinners. The cabinet secretary talked about the time to design a scheme, and I get that he wants that done with some speed. However, is there any latitude to revisit the situation of those who have retired since 2014?

Fergus Ewing: The majority of farmers and crofters who are farming now will have been farming in 2014 and will therefore benefit over the next two years' payments. It is fair to point out that the majority of those will benefit. Mr Finnie is right, however, to point out that some will not because they will have retired or, sadly, passed away.

However, I do not believe that the purpose of convergence money is to pay people retrospectively. I understand and sympathise with the case that Mr Finnie makes, but I do not think that it would be right to use the money for that. In addition, to have backtracked payments in that way would have required an exercise of labyrinthine complexity that could have tied up our systems for a couple of years before any payment

could have been made. That is certainly not what anyone wishes. I believe that I have the support of the main stakeholders for my approach. Mr Finnie has raised a fair point that I understand, but I think that we are doing the right thing.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement. The payment in question is not the only payment that the Scottish Government will provide to farmers and crofters. Can the cabinet secretary update us on what payments farmers and crofters have already received this year and how that compares to what is happening elsewhere in the UK?

Fergus Ewing: Yes, I can. So far, 13,837 farmers and crofters have received their national basic payment support loan payments, which are worth more than £334 million. The loans are the single biggest mitigation action that Scotland can provide to our farmers as they face the challenges of Brexit. We were the first Administration to offer loans and to make the loan payments. Indeed, I believe that our farmers and crofters will have received their money around two months earlier than their counterparts in England.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): The Liberal Democrats welcome the cabinet secretary's statement, how he will distribute the £80 million of convergence funding this financial year and, in particular, the fact that farmers and crofters will not have to apply for the payments. Will he use the same distribution formula when the Scottish Government receives the second tranche of £80 million in 2021, or—and I think that this would be very helpful—will he take time to analyse the effectiveness of his choices for distributing the first £80 million?

Fergus Ewing: Mr Rumbles makes a very important point, which I am pleased to have the opportunity to emphasise: no farmer or crofter needs to make an application. No one needs to pore over a form, worrying about how to fill it in or whether they will make mistakes. The funding will be paid using existing data and systems. That is one of the many benefits of the system—*[Interruption.]* The Tories do not like it; indeed, they do not seem to like anything at all about this, but there we are.

Mr Rumbles asked about the second tranche of funding. The second £80 million has been promised to us in the next financial year. We already have a plan to apply the same approach, to avoid a process with an application form.

We have provided the detail to members about the core principles, the basis of the methodology and the percentages that are to be applied to regions 1, 2 and 3. There are elements of the methodology that have yet to be finalised; we hope to do that next week in respect of the first

payment. We intend to apply the same approach in general terms to the second payment, when it is received. I will fully update Parliament—as I always freely and happily do—in due course.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Clearly, it is a great result for Scotland's crofters and farmers to get these moneys, which have been withheld from them for so long by the UK Government. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that it is worth continuing to uphold the principle of recognising the needs of crofters and farmers on the least favoured land, which the Scottish Crofting Federation and others have successfully argued for?

Fergus Ewing: The short answer is yes. Some 85 per cent of agricultural land is classified as less favoured, and support is vital to maintaining farming and land management in areas such as the Western Isles, which Dr Allan represents. Scotland is the only part of the UK that provides additional support to our most marginal farmers, especially those in crofting in the hills and uplands. I have supported that principle in the past, I support it in the present and I will support it in the future.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary outline his plans for the distribution of the second instalment of £80 million? When the time comes, will he once again repeat the “great rural robbery” and raid the convergence coffers—this time for £40 million for his LFASS shortfall—and again ignore the experts from the agriculture industry?

Fergus Ewing: I have heard of a brass neck, but the member must have been applying the Brasso last night to remove the tarnish. That is an absurd proposition. We are paying back money—£80 million—that was wrongfully withheld for six years by the Conservatives. We will pay the second £80 million once we receive it. We will not do that before we receive it, because we try to run finances prudently. [*Interruption.*]

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): And who can trust the Tories? We cannot trust them.

Fergus Ewing: Who can trust the Tories? The great irony—perhaps the Tories would like to listen to this—is that the Prime Minister has admitted that what took place in 2013 was a great injustice, but the Scottish Tories cannot bring themselves to admit that fact, even now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If the last two questioners are fairly succinct, I will get them both in.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The argument has always been

with the UK Government, which distributed the money from Europe to farmers elsewhere in the UK. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that no farmer elsewhere in the UK who received the money when they should not have done will be disadvantaged by what is happening? Our friends and colleagues in the important agricultural industry elsewhere equally deserve our support.

Fergus Ewing: I made it clear to Lord Bew, to whom I gave evidence, that Scottish hill farmers have an affinity with hill farmers in other parts of the UK. We took a reasonable approach. That underlay our ability to persuade Lord Bew and his colleagues to benefit Scotland in the way that has emerged from the work that they did.

The money is a great boost. Contrary to the nonsense that we have heard from the Tories today, every farmer and crofter will benefit. However, it is a short-term boost, and much uncertainty remains, especially because the UK Government, having said in the Brexit referendum that it would match EU money, is now, Treasury-driven, promising to end direct payments by 2027.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on the statement. I apologise to Ms Beamish, who did not manage to get in.

The Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions Annual Target Report for 2017

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a statement by Roseanna Cunningham on “The Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions Annual Target Report for 2017”. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:21

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): This is my first statement on climate change since the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill was passed, and it will be my last under the terms of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

In future years, statutory reporting on targets will take place only in the summer, when the statistics become available, and will not need to be repeated in October. However, we are still under the terms of the 2009 act, so yesterday I laid in Parliament “The Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions Annual Target Report for 2017”. It shows that, since 1990, we have almost halved emissions, and that Scotland continues to outperform the United Kingdom. In relation to the European Union, of the EU15 only Sweden has performed better than Scotland.

The 2017 target was not met partly because of the technical adjustment relating to the EU emissions trading system. However, between 2016 and 2017, actual emissions, which matter in tackling climate change, reduced by 3.3 per cent. In the future, progress towards targets that are established under the new legislation will be based on actual emissions, which will improve transparency. The remainder of my statement will focus on that future.

Members are aware that, yesterday, President Piñera announced that because of political unrest and widespread demonstrations, Chile will no longer host the 25th conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change—COP25—which was due to be held in Santiago in December. I am saddened by the events in Chile and the announcement about its not hosting the COP. It is vital that all nations continue to work closely together to address the global climate emergency: the summit is a crucial part of that dialogue. I note that the UN is exploring alternative hosting options, and I hope that it is possible to find another venue.

Next year, we will welcome thousands of people to Glasgow for COP26. We will do so proud in the knowledge that we have redefined international climate leadership. After the bill receives royal assent, which happens to be today, Scotland will have the most stringent climate legislation of any country in the world. Our end target to reach net zero greenhouse gases by 2045—five years ahead of the UK—is at the limit of feasibility.

Scotland’s new 75 per cent emissions reduction target for 2030 goes beyond what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says is needed globally to manage the risk of more than 1.5°C warming. It is an aspirational target that requires—if it is to be achieved—hard concerted and unrelenting effort by Government, Parliament, business, public authorities, communities and individuals.

This Government is leading by example, and has already stepped up our response. Our programme for government has the global climate emergency and a green new deal for Scotland at its heart. We are investing billions in tackling climate change. That includes more than £500 million in improved bus infrastructure, a commitment to provide £2 billion over 10 years to capitalise the Scottish national investment bank, and a £130 million investment this year to support the establishment of the bank and early financing activities. Over the next three years, a £3 billion portfolio of projects, including renewables, waste and construction projects, will be brought to market. That is just the start.

Within six months of today, we will publish an update to the climate change plan, out to 2032, to meet the new annual targets. The update will review our approaches and look for where more can be done across all key sectors, including agriculture, domestic energy and transport. It will build on our ambitious programme for government commitments, including on the creation of a new agricultural transformation programme, the setting of new standards to reduce energy demand in new buildings by 2021, and the holding of a consultation on the ambition to make the transformative shift to zero emission or ultra-low-emission city centres by 2030.

The update to the climate change plan is part of a wider picture. It will be taken forward in parallel with other key strategies to support the transition to a net zero emissions Scotland, including reviews of the national planning framework and the national transport strategy, and the development of a new infrastructure investment plan. Six months is a fraction of the time that it would take to produce a new climate change plan. I hope that Parliament will share that urgency when it undertakes its scrutiny of the update.

As Scotland's response to the emergency steps up, it is more important than ever that everyone be engaged in the decisions that we take. The school strikes have made it very clear that young people across Scotland want to see bold action. We will deliver that, but measures that are unfair, or that are perceived as being unfair, will not be accepted by the public—nor should they be. A just transition is central to our approach, and the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill has ensured that that is now firmly reflected in law.

I launched the big climate conversation in June. To date, more than 2,000 people have participated. Earlier this month, the Sustainable Scotland Network held a conference to discuss the role of the public sector in tackling climate change. Next month, I will co-convene a mission zero business summit with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work.

The just transition commission, which began its work at the start of this year, has been travelling the country to listen to the views of community groups, industry bodies, businesses and trade unions. To date, it has held meetings on energy, transport, the built environment and oil and gas, and has conducted a range of associated engagement activity, which has included co-hosting with the Energy Institute an event that was targeted at young people in industry.

In addition, the just transition commission visited Aberdeen Heat and Power to witness the impact of district heating schemes on alleviating fuel poverty among some of the most vulnerable sections of the population. It also met a community group in Kincardine to explore lessons that could be learned from our transition away from coal-fired power generation.

The just transition commission is functioning independently, but I am confident, given the breadth of its engagement, that its recommendations will reflect the concerns and aspirations of people across the country. I have asked it to produce an interim report at the start of the new year to outline the emerging themes, so that it can inform the update to the climate change plan.

Strong public engagement and our commitment to a just transition will continue beyond the update to the climate change plan. Formal plans are important documents, but the process of engagement and planning never really stops—it is a continuous loop, as we learn more about what works and what is needed.

Following the update to the climate change plan, we will hold a citizens assembly on climate change. We will also establish a national forum for

continued discussion, partnership working and joined-up action.

Although significant emissions reductions are needed, that is not our only focus. Following extensive stakeholder and public consultation, last month we laid in Parliament the new "Climate Ready Scotland: Second Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-2024". The programme adopts an outcomes-based approach that is derived from the United Nations sustainable development goals and Scotland's national performance framework. It will deliver a step change in collaboration, and it strongly promotes the wider co-benefits of climate action. For the first time, it includes behaviour change. It also includes research to improve our understanding of climate risks, and an integrated approach to monitoring and evaluation. The programme is a substantive response to the impacts of climate change, and will help to create a stronger and better society.

We expect soon to receive formal confirmation from the UN that the joint UK-Italy bid to host COP26 in Glasgow in 2020 has been successful. I know that Scotland's non-governmental organisations and businesses—and, of course, the city of Glasgow—are all ready to play their part next year. The Scottish Government expects to work collaboratively with the UK Government, not just on delivering a successful event but in driving the ambition of COP26.

We have offered to support the UK's policy development with Scottish Government specialists. I know that there is support across the parties and within the environmental non-governmental organisation community for the Scottish Government playing a significant role. Of course, we are already involved in the logistics, delivery of which will require the support of Glasgow City Council, Police Scotland and various Scottish Government agencies. However, we will maintain the pressure on the UK Government to meet the full costs of policing not just the congress but the wider impacts across Scotland.

Our climate change bill has redefined climate leadership. Living up to the targets will require different and more difficult choices than has been the case to date. Only with the full support of the whole of Scottish society, including Parliament, will we be able to achieve the enormous transformational change that is needed.

If we all accept that responsibility, Scotland can and will be at the forefront of the low-carbon future. We will be in a strong position to reap the economic and social benefits that that will entail and we will create the conditions for a strong and secure future for our young people and for generations yet to come.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement, for about 20 minutes.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement.

It will be of deep concern to members that the 2017 statutory emissions reduction target has been missed. Of course, I recognise that that has in part been due to the revision mechanisms that were agreed to in the 2009 act. Nevertheless, transport emissions increased between 2016 and 2017, and urgent action is required in the housing sector.

Will the cabinet secretary outline the process for revising the climate change plan in the light of the new requirements in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill, and will she define Parliament's role in scrutinising that?

Roseanna Cunningham: We are disappointed that the apparent fall in emissions is not reflected in the statistics. As I indicated in my opening statement, however, from next year we will be looking only at actual emissions, which will probably give us a far clearer understanding of Scotland's position.

I anticipated questions about the climate change plan update, which is why I also advised members that royal assent to the climate change bill was received literally only a couple of hours ago, so the clock is now ticking on the six-month commitment deadline. As I hinted, that also means that colleagues across the chamber will have to think carefully about the speed with which they deal with it.

In a sense, we are already starting work on that; we were not going to wait until the update. The update is being done in a short time. As I understand the position, we hope to be able to give the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee some three months to consider the new draft. They are challenging timescales for Parliament—I appreciate that—but I hope that they can be achieved. We also have to engage with stakeholders and the public throughout the process. With the will of everybody, we will manage to do that in the time that we have available.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of the statement.

Parliament must deliver a robust policy for a just transition if we are to be true leaders at COP26 in Glasgow. I welcome the clarification about the revised climate change plan, the citizens assembly

and the just transition commission's initial report, although I still urge the Government to reconsider the commission's limited lifespan.

Agriculture is the second-biggest contributor to Scotland's overall emissions but, crucially, it is also part of the solution. If we are to enable Scotland's land managers and farmers to respond to the climate crisis, the Government must commit to careful planning, quality data and the involvement of rural communities across Scotland. Can the cabinet secretary update us on the next steps towards implementing the regional land use frameworks, which were committed to in the programme for government and by Labour amendments to the climate change bill?

Roseanna Cunningham: I welcome Claudia Beamish's comments. As she knows, the just transition commission has been set up initially for two years; no decision has been made that it will end after two years. We will wait to see what the interim report then the final report say before we consider what next steps might be taken within the just transition framework.

However, our commitment to a just transition is longer than just the duration of the commission. There might be future developments that do not look exactly like this particular commission, but which nonetheless take the issue forward.

The member asked questions specifically on agriculture. I know that my colleague Fergus Ewing is very aware of not only the potential but the challenges in achieving continued emissions reductions. However, there are already emissions reductions in the agriculture sector. We owe it to ourselves to acknowledge that, and to understand that work is ongoing and that, in the main, farmers are on board.

We hope to develop the regional land use partnerships over the next year. I will come back as regularly as possible to Parliament at each stage of that process. Obviously such things do not happen overnight. I know from the conversations that I have across the board with the farming community—tenanted and landowning—and with many of the bigger estates—that there is a huge commitment to making a really positive change for Scotland for the future.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The cabinet secretary said in her statement that

"Sweden has performed better than Scotland".

Next year Sweden will meet all of its heating needs from renewable energy, while in Scotland we will meet less than a tenth from that. Is the Scottish Government prepared to learn from Sweden, particularly on its approach to industry

action plans, which could help to smooth supply chains and drive demand?

Even when the renewable heat incentive was high, before the Tories cut it, it failed to bring about the changes, and now we are looking at failed targets on heating.

Roseanna Cunningham: That is quite a general question. I hope that Mark Ruskell and everybody else in the chamber is conscious of our willingness to learn from almost anywhere where there are lessons to be learned, just as other countries could learn from us.

I am happy to talk to my Swedish counterparts. Indeed, I have had meetings with them and intend to have meetings at the COP25 gathering—wherever that might now be—not only with them but with others. I have spoken before with our New Zealand and Danish counterparts, and will continue to do that.

Equally, it is not a one-way process, and as willing as I am to learn from other countries, perhaps they can also learn from us. I note that although Sweden is ahead of us in terms of the EU15, and we concede the leadership role to it, we include a share of aviation and shipping in our stats and Sweden does not, so maybe it can learn something from us as well.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The cabinet secretary referred in her statement to external events that have affected the outcome and the review related to the emissions trading scheme. I know that in May she wrote to the UK Government about the actions that it needs to take that will affect our ability to meet our targets. Has she had any response that might help us to understand how we are going to operate the scheme in future?

Roseanna Cunningham: I have not received a substantive response to the letter that I sent in May. To the best of my knowledge, the UK Government has not made any progress on any of the issues that I raised. It might have been otherwise occupied during that time, which is a shame, because the situation is far from satisfactory. I can assure members that my officials and I have been trying to get a substantive response for some time. We now have another hiatus, and I will continue to pursue the matter with any new UK Government.

However, I want to be very clear that I do not want to allow any UK Government to get in the way of Scotland achieving its ambitions to play our full part in helping to end climate change.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The cabinet secretary has outlined some useful measures in her statement today, but she is right that different and difficult choices will be required.

Following the declaration of the climate emergency, when she is in discussion with the UK Government, will the cabinet secretary raise the issue of the third runway at Heathrow? I assume that the Scottish Government will write to the Prime Minister and withdraw its support for that third runway in the light of the climate emergency.

Roseanna Cunningham: I am certain that Willie Rennie knows perfectly well that such a letter would not emanate from my portfolio. I will make sure that the appropriate minister for that is advised of his interest in the matter. I note that he does not have anything to say about climate change beyond that, which is a pity, because there is quite a lot that could have been said, even on the aviation sector, but I will not attract his ire by going on about it.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): It is unfortunate that the difficult decision has had to be made not to hold COP25, which I understand the cabinet secretary was to attend, in Chile. Can she outline the areas that the Scottish Government was intending to highlight in which other countries stand to learn from Scotland's leadership on climate change?

Roseanna Cunningham: What has happened is a shame, if perhaps understandable. However, it is still vital that the international community works together.

I had planned to attend and highlight the progress that Scotland is making in reducing emissions while promoting sustainable and fair economic growth through the work of the just transition commission, which I find to be of enormous interest wherever I go internationally to talk about climate change. I had also planned to highlight Scotland's leadership on climate justice and gender considerations, in which many activists in many other countries would wish their own Governments to take an interest.

I was also looking forward to deepening our international partnerships—for example, through the Under2 Coalition—and I will continue that work at COP26 next year and at COP25 in whatever shape or form it will now take.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Today's figures remind us that agriculture is a major source of emissions in Scotland, but we must recognise that farmers are already making big changes to help with the climate crisis. They are willing and able to go further, but they need support to do so. Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on the development of the agricultural modernisation fund to which her Government committed in its programme for government, and which Scottish Conservative amendments secured during the passage of the

Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am advised by my colleague that the Government is already providing very substantial amounts of money to farmers in respect of the environment. I am aware of the member's interest—he must know that it is an area in which we have a significant interest too. As I indicated in an early response, we very much want to support farmers to go through the process of change, and we find that they are very keen to do so.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be well aware that disposable beverage cups in Scotland produce an estimated 5,900 tonnes of CO₂ per year, with much of that coming from the plastic lids. I welcome the Scottish Government's announcement that it is going to legislate for a charge to be applied on single-use drinks as part of the proposed circular economy bill. Can the cabinet secretary outline what other actions the Scottish Government is taking to tackle the environmental impact of single-use plastics?

Roseanna Cunningham: We are taking a range of actions on single-use plastics in Scotland, and we are aiming to meet or exceed the standards set out in the EU single-use plastics directive. We are proud to be the first UK Administration to introduce regulations that ban plastic-stemmed cotton buds. We will take further action by restricting sales of other problematic single-use plastic items such as cutlery, plates and food-and-drink containers by July 2021. We will consider carefully the potential impacts on equality for disabled people in particular, and apply exemptions where appropriate.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): What new resources is the Scottish Government allocating to ensure that local authorities have the funding and capacity to lead the transition on low-carbon, affordable community heat and power schemes across the country, and the re-engineering and planning of our communities to deliver low-carbon transport and active travel, in order to support employment and health and reduce our emissions?

Roseanna Cunningham: As the member knows, we no longer hypothecate funding to local authorities. The agreements are done on the basis of negotiation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and an agreed amount of money is disbursed to individual local authorities for them to make decisions as and when they choose.

I congratulate a number of local authorities for having very high ambitions indeed. The high ambitions of the likes of Glasgow City Council, City of Edinburgh Council and others is creating a

bit of competition among local authorities, which can only be to the good. However, it is for local authorities themselves to make decisions about how they spend their money and what they choose to do. I expect that that will involve a significant conversation between COSLA and the Scottish Government each time they meet to discuss the annual global figure.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I support the Scottish Government's efforts to ensure that Scotland meets its world-leading climate change targets. To that end, what consideration is the Government giving to encouraging local planning authorities to take a more relaxed approach to the installation of solar panels on homes and in conservation areas such as Kings Park, in my constituency of Stirling?

Roseanna Cunningham: That was not a planted question, but it resonates extraordinarily with me, because I live in a conservation area. I experience some of the same issues that Bruce Crawford has raised in relation to his constituents. The programme for government commits us to reviewing and extending permitted development rights in a range of areas, including microrenewables such as domestic solar panels, which is very good news. We commissioned a sustainability appraisal to consider the social, economic and environmental impacts, including the potential impacts of such changes on conservation areas. We will publish the findings shortly, together with a proposed work programme for taking forward consideration of such changes. Bruce Crawford might be interested in that work when it is published, and I assure him that I will be, too.

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): I note my entry in the register of members' interests in relation to renewable energy.

Scottish Power's "Zero Carbon Communities" report, which was published last week, says that the estimated cost of installing heat pumps in homes is £16.5 billion, with more than 70 to be installed every day between now and 2045. Will the current support that the Scottish Government gives to the sector be sufficient to achieve the target?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am advised that there is a £30 million fund for that work. I might be wrong, but my guess is that the issues will be about not only money but availability of skills and materials and so on. Those are some of the practical challenges that we will all face when we make some of the big changes that require to be made. I know from my experience of developing the existing climate change plan that the rapid acceleration of change that people might wish to see can be stymied not so much because of money but because of being physically unable to

do some of the work that is necessary. Money is available, and I am sure that my colleague Paul Wheelhouse will engage directly with Alexander Burnett on the detail.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): We sometimes notice that although Opposition MSPs are very keen to have ambitious targets, they are wholly opposed to practical measures, such as the workplace parking levy. Does the cabinet secretary think that we can reach the targets by easy methods, or will difficult decisions need to be made?

Roseanna Cunningham: Who can John Mason mean? It never ceases to amaze me how often Opposition parties are happy to will the ends but not the means. That, frankly, will not be possible in the future. As I made very clear during the debates on the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill, if we set bold and ambitious targets, we must be prepared to take bold and ambitious action to meet them. All parties that supported the target of reducing emissions by 75 per cent by 2030 did so knowing how enormously challenging that will be, and they must now be prepared to join us in making the difficult decisions that are necessary to meet the target.

However, we must not lose sight of the opportunity that addressing and mitigating climate change represents. It is a challenge, but there are opportunities relating to skills, jobs, industries and new technologies, which can help to support the country's economic and social wellbeing in the future. We must grasp those opportunities fully.

Forestry Act 1919 (Centenary)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-19631, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the centenary of the Forestry Act 1919.

15:50

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): I am delighted to open this debate to mark the centenary of the Forestry Act 1919. In 1919, Scotland looked very different from today; the landscape itself was different. In 1920, the newly formed Forestry Commission calculated that there were just over 460,000 hectares of woodland in Scotland—only 5 per cent of Scotland's land area.

Scotland's forests had been a vital resource in the great war—David Lloyd George remarked that the war was more nearly lost through lack of timber than want of food—but those forests were perilously depleted. More than 200 square miles of woodland had been felled since 1914. That was the backdrop to the Forestry Act 1919, which created the Forestry Commission with the aims of replanting felled areas, creating new woodlands and promoting better timber production.

Scotland's forests were called on again during the second world war. Robin Jenkins's great Scottish novel, "The Cone Gatherers" brings to life the work to collect the seeds needed to restock Scotland's forests at the end of that war. The war years also saw the creation of the Women's Timber Corps—the lumberjills. In 2007, the then environment minister, Mike Russell, joined surviving members to unveil a statue in the Queen Elizabeth forest park to commemorate the 4,000 members of that corps.

Less well known, perhaps, is the contribution of foresters from across the Commonwealth. I was glad to be in contact, last year and this, with the High Commissioner to Belize to acknowledge the huge contribution made by the 900 men of the British Honduras Forestry Unit during the war. More than 6,000 also came from Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Many of them chose to stay and make their lives here, and some have descendants who I hope are proud of their roots and heritage and also, now, of being Scots.

In this year's programme for government, we said that we would plant a woodland to commemorate those foresters from across the Commonwealth and also to mark the centenary of the 1919 act. There can be no more fitting legacy to mark that pivotal contribution from foresters from our fellow Commonwealth states than to plant trees.

I can announce today that, through a partnership with Glasgow City Council, there will be a new planting of trees in Pollok park in Glasgow. I am particularly pleased that that should be the location, given the prominent role played by Sir John Stirling Maxwell—who owned the Pollok estate before it was given to the people of Glasgow—in inspiring and running the Forestry Commission in its early years.

I can also announce that the planting will be expanded, following consultation and engagement with the local community and stakeholder organisations, to create a living memorial to mark 100 years of the Forestry Act 1919, which locals and visitors will be able to enjoy for, I hope, the next 100 years.

One hundred years on, we have ensured that Scotland's forestry sector looks to the future. Last year, we passed the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018 to ensure that forestry is accountable to, and the responsibility of, the Scottish ministers and this Parliament.

On 1 April this year, we created two agencies: Scottish Forestry, to advise on forestry policy, regulate the sector and support sustainable forest management; and Forestry and Land Scotland, to manage Scotland's publicly owned national forests and land. Earlier this month I was glad to launch FLS's corporate plan, which is ambitious about the potential of that invaluable natural resource for Scotland.

In February, with cross-party support, we published Scotland's forestry strategy. It describes how, by 2070, Scotland will have yet more forests. They will be sustainably managed and better integrated with other land uses; they will provide a more resilient and adaptable resource, with greater natural capital value; and they will support a strong economy, a thriving environment, and healthy and flourishing communities.

We will report on progress in delivering the strategy and we will publish an implementation plan. I look forward to providing further details of that to Parliament next year.

The strategy makes clear how versatile Scotland's forests are, that they provide a home to more than 1,000 species, and that they enrich the lives and improve the health of the millions of people who live, work and play in them.

The strategy also demonstrates the unique importance of Scotland's forests in tackling the overarching challenge of climate change. Their contribution is unique because they are a powerful carbon sink, which we can expand. Our climate change plan includes ambitious targets to do that. In 2018-19, we smashed our annual target of 10,000 hectares by planting 11,210 hectares. That

was 84 per cent of the woodland that was created in the United Kingdom in that year.

However, we must go further. The programme for government sets the new aim to create 12,000 hectares of woodland in 2019-20. That is ambitious, especially in light of the reduction of nursery stock, but we have made available extra resources of £5 million. We anticipate accelerating and increasing our targets beyond 2021.

The contribution that Scotland's forests make to fighting climate change is unique in the opportunity that it represents. Scotland already has a thriving forestry sector, which supports 25,000 jobs and contributes no less than £1 billion a year to the economy. The industry's leadership group, which I met on Tuesday, has published a strategy to double that contribution by 2030.

Expanding our forests and the contribution of our forestry sector is good for our national economy. It will help to support the population of our rural areas and to fight climate change by removing millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and locking up that carbon dioxide indefinitely in the millions of tonnes of timber harvested for long-term uses, such as construction.

One hundred years on from 1919, Scotland's forests cover around 19 per cent of our land area, and our publicly owned national forests and land extend to 640,000 hectares. Forestry is of its nature a long-term business. It is right to look back on 100 years of achievement and to appreciate those who have contributed to those achievements. They provide us and our children with a woodland inheritance that is rich in opportunities for the next 100 years.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the opportunity to mark 100 years since the Forestry Act 1919; notes the progress made since 1919 in increasing Scotland's forest cover from 5% to nearly 19%; appreciates the contribution made by the men and women who have worked in forestry in Scotland, including those from Commonwealth countries who were members of forestry units in Scotland during and after the Second World War; acknowledges the importance of forests and woodland to the rural economy, to the health and wellbeing of communities and especially to the environment; recognises that forests and woodland are among Scotland's most important natural assets in helping to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, and resolves to encourage everyone to get involved in planting more trees over the next 100 years.

15:57

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): It is 100 years since the Forestry Act 1919 was passed and the Forestry Commission was born. The commission has overseen a largely unregulated private forestry industry's transformation to the thriving sector that we know today.

A century ago, just 5 per cent of Scotland's land was forested; today, forest and woodland cover 19 per cent of Scotland. In Dumfries and Galloway, which is my home region, 31 per cent of the land is covered with woods and forests. That makes Dumfries and Galloway the most forested part of Scotland. Those 211,000 hectares include the great spruce forests of Galloway and Eskdalemuir, the traditional estate forests, such as those of Buccleuch Estates, and small native and farm woodlands, which are important to the beautiful landscape of Dumfries and Galloway.

Those woods and forests also make a huge economic contribution to the region. The timber industry is among the most important employers locally; there are more than 3,000 jobs in it across all sectors, from planting to processing. Many of those jobs are in some of the most remote rural areas.

Indeed, across Scotland, the forestry sector is of huge economic importance. It contributes almost £1 billion gross value added to the Scottish economy every year and supports more than 25,000 jobs.

I pay tribute to all those who have worked in the sector—past and present—and contributed to its growth and success over the past 100 years. I also place on record Labour's thanks to the trade unions that represent many of those workers—Unite the union, the GMB, the Public and Commercial Services Union, Prospect and the FDA—for the work that they do to secure the best terms and conditions for their workers.

Forestry is a high-risk industry. Every year, workers in it are injured at work; in some cases, they are—sadly—killed. Many more suffer from work-related illness.

We should recognise the important role that our unions have played—in some cases for more than a century—in driving up safety standards for workers in forestry as the industry has grown.

It is not just the forestry coverage of our land and its economic impact that have grown in that time; so, too, have our recognition and appreciation of the social benefits of forestry. Since the 1970s in particular, the Forestry Commission has encouraged more people to see forests and our land as destinations for leisure and exercise. That shift in focus has helped to unlock our land's potential for contributing to improving health and wellbeing, and today—more than ever—we need to build on that legacy.

Our national parks have been important contributors to delivering the economic, social and environmental benefits of our land. Nineteen years ago, the Parliament passed the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, which paved the way for the Labour-led Scottish Executive to create the Loch

Lomond and the Trossachs national park in 2002 and the Cairngorms national park in 2003.

A report by the Scottish Campaign for National Parks has identified seven possible new national parks in Scotland, including a Galloway national park centred around the outstanding Galloway forest park, which would allow us to build on the outstanding natural assets of the region.

National parks have helped to deliver a major economic boost to their areas, supporting local businesses, generating jobs for young people, providing affordable homes, promoting investment in sustainable rural development and growing the tourism sector. They have also delivered an environmental boost, restoring paths and peatlands, assisting with species recovery and, crucially, restoring and conserving native woodlands.

That work is so important because one of the downsides of the changes in forestry over the past 100 years has been the extent to which our native woodlands have been left to decline, either through neglect or, in some cases, by design. The economic value of native woodland fell as its use was replaced by that of imports, and only niche markets using native timber were left. Across Scotland, huge swathes of our countryside were planted with conifers, which became standard forestry policy in the drive to increase timber production, incentivised by huge tax breaks.

Today, we are slowly learning from those past mistakes. Native woods are better protected, they are no longer persecuted and there are landscape-scale restoration efforts, such as the great Trossachs forest national nature reserve at the heart of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park.

As biodiversity continues to decline globally, far more needs to be done to appreciate that our native woodlands are some of the most biodiverse habitats. We must better safeguard and expand those habitats from the measly 2 per cent that they cover today.

Forestry has a crucial role to play in helping Scotland to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis that we face, including through meeting our new emissions targets, with estimates suggesting that every new hectare of forest and woodland that is created removes an average of 7 tonnes of CO₂ from the atmosphere every year. That must be a key driver in Scottish forestry policy in the years ahead, including through the continued expansion of planting—crucially, in the right places and with a proper mix of species.

There has been impressive growth in the forestry sector since the Forestry Commission was established 100 years ago. As that growth continues, it is critical that it is managed well and

that we properly balance the economic, social and environmental benefits of a sector that is so important to many communities across Scotland.

I move amendment S5M-19631.4, to insert at end:

“; celebrates the contribution of the forestry sector trade unions; recognises the potential that sustainable management of diverse forest and woodland has in meeting biodiversity targets post 2020; notes the importance of planting taking place in appropriate areas; recognises the contribution that national parks make to protecting forestry and widening the natural environment, and therefore believes that new national parks should be designated.”

16:03

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):

I am delighted to open on behalf of the Conservatives, and I welcome the opportunity to speak about the centenary of the Forestry Act 1919. Before the 1919 act, there was no notable state policy on forests. It was recognised that the UK's forests had been in decline since the middle ages, but world war one led to an increased demand for timber and, by the end of the conflict, forest cover had significantly declined.

Moreover, there was an acute awareness of the strategic risks of an overreliance on imported timber. It was noted at the time that only 5 per cent of Great Britain was wooded, compared with 25 per cent of Germany. That led to great concern regarding the state of British forests and woodland. The 1919 act was passed to alleviate those concerns and established the Forestry Commission. The act gave authority to the commission to acquire and plant land, to promote timber supply and forest industries, to undertake education and research, to make grants and to give advice to woodland owners.

The Forestry Commission went from strength to strength and, by the start of world war two, it was the largest landowner in Britain. During the war period, employment in the Forestry Commission expanded to 44,000 in 1941, up from 14,000 in 1939. Many of the new employees included the women's timber corps, who were affectionately known as the lumberjills. Another group that must be acknowledged and thanked for its contribution to the British war effort is the British Honduran forestry unit. Those volunteers arrived in a harsh Scottish winter and swapped tropical forests for hard frosts, which must have been a huge shock to the system.

The end of the war saw the commission turn more of its attention to research, especially into how to increase production. By the 1960s, the Forestry Commission was carrying out 40 per cent of all tree planting in the UK and had greatly

increased timber sales, which led to the creation of thousands of new jobs.

However, in an era in which there was an increase in the amount of available leisure time, the forests were beginning to be seen as a place of recuperation and relaxation. That led to the creation of the Countryside Act 1968, which granted a right to roam that allowed the public greater use of the forests for recreational purposes. That led to a trend of sustainable forestry, which has continued until today. Indeed, from 1997, all conifer, or productive woodland, has been planted under the UK forestry standard to incorporate an area of least 25 per cent that is managed primarily for biodiversity objectives and comprises native broadleaves and open areas.

Scotland's forests and woodlands are important in promoting tourism through providing stunning natural beauty, and that importance in supporting the rural economy was estimated to be worth £183 million in 2015.

The recent creation of two new agencies to help to manage Scotland's forests, Forestry and Land Scotland and Scottish Forestry, marked the fact that forestry had become fully devolved. Today, forest and woodlands cover 19 per cent of our land. However, although that is a significant improvement, it still falls well short of the European Union average of 38 per cent. Moreover, the Scottish Government should acknowledge that, from 2002 until 2018, it did not meet the target of planting 10,000 hectares, which will lead to a scarcity of trees in 30 years' time. I welcome the fact that we have achieved our planting target this year and I also welcome the increased planting targets going forward.

The important environmental role of sustainably managed forest and woodland cannot be overstated in the battle against climate change. Growing trees absorb and store huge amounts of carbon. In addition, almost 50 per cent of the carbon benefit of a forest comes from the substitution of wood fuel and timber for fossil fuels.

Scotland is better for the Forestry Act 1919 and we encourage people to celebrate it by getting involved in planting more trees over the next 100 years. However, that must be done only where it is economically and environmentally sustainable to do so. We must not repeat the mistakes of the past and plant trees on deep peat, as we did so disastrously on the flow country a generation ago, nor plant our best arable land, which is needed to feed our population. However, I believe that there is still plenty land in Scotland that can usefully and profitably be used to grow trees, and that is what we should do.

16:08

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):

I am delighted to speak in the debate, 100 years on from the Forestry Act 1919 and the beginning of a major effort to reforest the United Kingdom. The legislation led to the creation of the Forestry Commission and a major programme of planting and building a nationally owned forestry estate.

As others have said, at the time of the legislation, only 5 per cent of the UK was forested: 100 years later, 18 per cent of Scotland is forested. To put that clearly into context, grouse shooting estates alone make up 20 per cent of all land in Scotland. We are still a long way from the target of 40 per cent—the average across Europe—that the Scottish Green Party would like to see. That target formed part of an amendment that was not selected for the debate. With the climate emergency, meeting that target is more urgent than ever. It is unfortunate that, at current reforestation rates, it will be 150 years before we meet the target. However, it is important to be positive, and there is a lot to be positive about.

We need to learn from, and be inspired by, the vision and impetus that were shown 100 years ago and commit to a major reforestation programme. That will assist us in tackling the climate emergency and will create rural jobs and economic opportunity throughout Scotland.

Research for the Revive coalition shows that forestry can provide a job for every 42 hectares, compared with one job for every 183 hectares for agriculture and one job for every 330 hectares for grouse shooting. The benefits should be clear for everyone to see.

I am proud to say that I was born and brought up in a forest house. My father was a labourer for the Forestry Commission for 25 years; he even operated a Forestry Commission horse—there are not too many of those about now. I also went on to work for the Forestry Commission. The big attraction—as with much of the public sector—was the housing that the commission provided. It created a lot of communities, particularly across the Highlands. That was the case at the hydro and the canal, where I worked. One of my duties was as a tree feller—cutting down trees in a squad of over a dozen people. Those people have now been replaced by one machine. We know now that the challenge of the skills shortage means that we have difficulty recruiting people to use those very expensive machines.

We are calling for a Scottish green new deal to mobilise the unprecedented public investment behind reforestation and supporting the development of sustainable forestry and related businesses. As the cabinet secretary and others have mentioned, there is a lot of ancillary business

running alongside forestry. We need to focus in particular on building the public forestry estate. There have been significant acquisitions and disposals over the years. It is important that we manage publicly owned forests for current and future generations.

We also need to alter the profile of who owns the estate. Much of the land is in the hands of a small number of privileged individuals and is dominated by blood sport interests, particularly in the uplands. That leads to limited rural employment opportunities, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and serious erosion of the public enjoyment of our land and the many benefits that that brings. That is in stark contrast to the role that native forest restoration and creation could play in creating new employment opportunities and fighting climate breakdown.

The sum of £1 million has been mentioned. That money supports the rural population. I do not suppose that I am alone in wanting to see the products being used. Rather than importing cheap PVC window frames and door frames from the far east, it would be far better if we could harness and make greater use of our own timber. As I said, greater diversity of ownership is also important.

In the short time that I have left, I want to mention a student at the Scottish School of Forestry, at Balloch, on the outskirts of Inverness. Lawrence Carlile, a first-year student, said:

“In terms of the climate emergency that we now face, I believe that drastic carbon emissions cutting and sequestration through nature-based draw-down strategies like afforestation and peat land restoration is of the utmost importance, and by reforesting the landscape in an ecologically sensitive way we can also go some way to help mitigate the effects of climate change such as droughts and flooding.”

As we celebrate 100 years since the 1919 act, I suggest that we redouble our efforts and pay particular attention to Lawrence’s words.

16:13

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):

This is a splendid opportunity to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Forestry Act 1919. At the outset, I want to make it clear that the Scottish Liberal Democrats whole-heartedly support the motion that is before us this afternoon.

We have already heard that 100 years ago, the forestry cover of the UK was estimated to have fallen to only about 5 per cent of the land surface. However, throughout our history, over thousands of years, people have most commonly created farmland at the expense of forestry. Any potential tension between farming and forestry is hardly a modern phenomenon. However, after the tragedy of the first world war, our forestry cover was

estimated to be at an all-time low. The 1919 act that set up the Forestry Commission was principally designed to ensure that Britain maintained a strategic reserve of timber from a very low base. Even today, as the motion highlights, it is estimated that only about 19 per cent of Scotland's land surface is given to timber. Even at that level of coverage, Scotland remains one of the most deforested countries in Europe. That level of woodland cover is well below the European average of almost double that—37 per cent. We have a long way to go.

The figures that were provided by the Scottish Parliament information centre show that the total area of the national forest estate and woodland has been in steady decline for some considerable time. There was a marked jump in forestation in 2010; however, the level has since declined. Page 10 of the SPICe document states:

"Planting rates averaged 8,000 hectares per annum between 2011-12 and 2014-15 ... In 2015-16 the rate fell to 4,600 hectares per annum ... The Scottish Government has a target of averaging 10,000 ha per year of new woodland creation from 2015 onwards, which is yet to be met."

I very much welcome the Scottish Government's target of the new planting of 10,000 hectares per annum; however, the problem has been in reaching it. I hope that the Scottish Government is successful in its forestry ambitions. It is absolutely right that our new planting is increased, not only because it is important to have a strong timber industry—which makes a major contribution to the economy—but, even more important, because a major increase in tree planting is essential for the country to meet its climate change objectives and tackle what is perhaps the most important issue of our time. So, I wish the Scottish Government well. I encourage it to meet its new tree planting targets, and I know that the cabinet secretary is sincere in aiming to do just that.

Turning to Labour's amendment, we support the establishment of new national parks, learning from the Cairngorms and the Loch Lomond experiences. They were created at the time of the Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition almost 20 years ago, which I remember so well, with fond memory. One of the lessons of those experiences was that we must take a grass-roots, not a top-down, approach to establishing national parks. It is for communities themselves to decide whether they want the benefits of improvements in land management and conservation, and of tourism, that national parks provide. They should not be imposed on communities, as I think that the Labour amendment almost threatens. *[Interruption.]* The Labour Party is telling the Government to establish new national parks. However, it should really be a bottom-up, not a top-down, approach. With that caveat, we will vote

for Labour's amendment this afternoon. We fully support the Government motion, too.

Colin Smyth: I thank Mike Rumbles for taking an intervention. Can he tell us where, either in my speech or in Labour's amendment, we plan to impose any national parks? The park in Galloway that has been referred to is very much about a bottom-up approach. Is Mike Rumbles telling the people of Galloway that he opposes that? I think that he needs to say that now, particularly to the election candidates in the weeks ahead.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mike Rumbles.

Mike Rumbles: I had actually finished, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You had finished. Do you not want to retort? You have time, if you would like to.

Mike Rumbles: I do not want to get involved in party politics.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Quit while you are ahead, if you think that you are ahead.

Colin Smyth: You are in the pocket of the Government, Mike—that is your problem.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Smyth, you should speak through the chair and you should not use the term "you".

We were all getting on nicely—I thought that we all loved trees. Let us go back to the tone of the debate prior to this little altercation, which was unnecessary.

16:17

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I will simply close off the issue of national parks by saying that it is slightly unusual to incorporate it into an amendment in the way that has been done. I do not oppose national parks; I just think that the approach is slightly odd. However, there we are; that is neither here nor there.

In 1919 debate on the second reading of the Forestry Bill, which took place on 5 August and went on until eight o'clock in the evening, the slightly different figure was given of only 4—not 5—per cent of the UK being covered by forestry. However, I do not think that we should argue about a per cent here or there. More fundamentally, that illustrated the problem that, in 1915-16, three quarters of the amount of timber that the UK required had to be imported. That was the scale of the problem, and that was at a point when Germany had many times more acres planted.

John Finnie might be interested to know that it was also identified in that debate that there were 5 million acres of sporting land that were thought to be suitable for planting, which would have been a better use of that land. Some debates are not new; those issues were part of the original second reading debate in the House of Commons in 1919.

Like others, I am very pleased to mark the centenary of the Forestry Act 1919. Forestry was one of my ministerial responsibilities before I demitted office some time ago. I very much enjoyed that part of my portfolio, because forests are important and forestry supports so many jobs, not only directly but downstream. We build timber-frame houses and we have sawmills, which make an important contribution to our economy and to tackling climate change.

The first forestry act was needed because of the war emergency. It was vital then that we had timber, and it was recognised that we needed to do something about it.

We know that, depending on implementation, forestry can help with or hinder the dangers that are related to climate change. Trees can absorb water and promote higher soil infiltration rates, which helps with issues such as flooding. They capture carbon out of the air and store it—they are huge and important carbon sinks.

Therefore, we celebrate our forests not simply for their physical expression of what we might otherwise express in poetry—they are visual poetry and a feast for the mind, as well as for the nose. When it comes to the environment, they are crucial to our future.

We have become more aware of the importance of woodlands. Although the Community Woodlands Association was not set up until 2003, it came from a decades-long appreciation of the importance of community woodlands. On the part of Mike Rumbles's speech that related to national parks, I note that through the community asset transfer scheme that we passed in 2017, communities are taking more interest in forestry than they used to.

For many people who sit at screens each day and are parked in offices, time in a forest can contribute to good mental health. There is a quiet, stillness and placid environment in a forest that is a balm for the soul.

It is important to think about where we go now. We have to do a lot more planting of forests in Scotland, and I hope that we continue to do that.

In 1919, my father was 14 years old and at Fortrose academy, and my father's cousin, James Stevenson, was part of Lloyd George's Government, which introduced the bill.

16:22

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am pleased to be celebrating our forest industry today, especially given that it is of such importance to my constituency of Galloway and West Dumfries, as you are well aware, Presiding Officer.

The forestry industry has changed beyond all recognition since the 1919 act was passed a century ago, and it will continue to evolve in future generations to meet new challenges.

Galloway is home to the largest forest park in the United Kingdom. It was created in 1947 and extends to almost 300 square miles and 97,000 hectares. A decade ago, it had the honour of being designated the UK's first dark sky park, which, as one of the best star-gazing spots in Europe, has brought thousands of tourists to the region each year.

Galloway forest and the people who live and work there were recently featured in the hugely popular TV series, "The Forest". It is home to two of the world-famous seven stanes mountain bike trails. Kirroughtree and Glentool have stunning scenery and routes for all ages and abilities. At Kirroughtree, which is a 10-minute cycle ride from my home, there is everything from family trails to single tracks for more experienced mountain bikers, as well as extensive walking routes. At Glentool, people can try their hand at everything from fun routes to long road-based forest rides.

At other forestry sites in Dumfries and Galloway, we have more of the seven stanes mountain bike trails: Ae Forest, Mabie near Dumfries and Dalbeattie.

Fun in the forest does not stop at mountain biking. People can relax in the Kirroughtree visitor centre, head to the wild watch hide to watch red squirrels and birds—right now, everything is under the fantastic colours of the autumn tree canopy—or enjoy a walk around Bruntis Loch. There is also the fabulous red deer range and a wild goat park. The area is truly an international gem in terms of its natural environment and biodiversity.

I often wonder whether the foresters who were at the heart of creating the Galloway forest park just after the second world war could have imagined how it would look today.

Although there has been a boom of activity in the park in recent years, with many new projects that have boosted tourist numbers, the Galloway region as a whole has not received the employment benefits that it should have done. It is still the case that far too few jobs are being created, despite more facilities being available for visitors and local people. That is why we on the Conservative benches are pleased to support the

Labour amendment, which in effect calls for the designation of new national parks, and there can be no better place to start than Galloway. National park status for Galloway would bring transformational change to the region and would support truly sustainable growth in terms of the economy and the environment.

The Galloway National Park Association has an active bottom-up campaign in Galloway with wide support, but despite the fact that it has evidenced that support and the huge benefits that national park status would bring to the region, the Government appears to keep raising the bar in what it is asking the association to do to formally start the process of considering the establishment of a park. I call on the cabinet secretary and his ministers to set out clearly the process that, if followed, would trigger the required consultations and feasibility studies that are outlined in the legislation for creating new national parks. Our forestry sector, environment and rural economy would undoubtedly benefit from that status. Given the right governance, it could be the catalyst for us to truly maximise the benefits that we can derive from the forest.

I hope that the debate reinforces the importance of the industry to many of our communities and of continuing to support those who work there. I call on the Scottish Government to look again at new ways in which it can help the Galloway forest park to grow and flourish. I regularly say that I am privileged to be the constituency MSP for Scotland's most beautiful constituency, and that is in no small part down to the Galloway forest park. I applaud all those who are working to make it such a success.

16:26

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in this debate on the centenary of the Forestry Act 1919. No one can have any doubt that forests and woodland areas play a huge role in Scotland's economic and social life. Crucially, they also form part of our natural and historical heritage, they are vital habitats for diverse ecosystems and, no doubt, they will be part of the solution in tackling climate change.

That is certainly the case for significant parts of the rural areas in my Stirling constituency. The Stirling area is home to the Queen Elizabeth forest park, which is a stunning area with an amazing range of wooded areas and visitor attractions. The park ranges from Strathyre in the north down to the east side of Loch Lomond and takes in the Loch Katrine and Aberfoyle areas, too. That gives plenty of scope for activities such as walking, wildlife watching and cycling, as well as logging, which is vital.

Forestry and Land Scotland promotes the three lochs drive, which is a 7-mile forest drive that gives visitors the opportunity to see the stunning Trossachs area for themselves. The Lodge forest visitor centre, which is located in Aberfoyle, is the first stop for visitors looking to explore the area. That is an example of the importance of our natural heritage to tourism and visitor numbers and to the overall economy.

Much of the area benefits from a strong presence of native woodland. The latest forestry figures that I could find detailing the impact and importance of native woodland show that such woodland covers 6 per cent of the land in the Stirling area, totalling more than 13,000 hectares, with a stunning 91 per cent of that coverage made up of species native to Scotland. However, it is worth mentioning that invasive plant species continue to play a destructive role in our wooded areas. Unfortunately, 2.5 per cent of Stirling's native woodland shrub and field layers are taken up by invasive species, with the main threat being the rhododendron. The nature of those invasive species means that preventing them from spreading is a real problem. That is an on-going challenge for all organisations that are involved in preserving and maintaining our magnificent woodlands, and it is particularly important when it comes to protecting our ancient woodlands, which are delicately balanced. Preserving those areas is a must for future generations.

I will use my remaining time to raise an issue that I am passionate about: cycling routes. I believe that such routes are important for the future of rural areas that have forests, such as the rural Stirling area. I have seen for myself the impact that cycling routes can have on visitor numbers in rural areas. Stirling benefits hugely from the Sustrans network, and the Dukes weekender cycling event in Aberfoyle brings many hundreds of people to the area. It is a real boost to the local economy and a significant event in promoting a healthy and active lifestyle.

Still more could be done to increase the scope for clean, green, healthy and active visits to some of our forestry areas. The benefits of bringing people into those areas in a well-managed way to engage in such activities are wide ranging. The activities do not just benefit the economy and improve public health, but promote the spectacular natural heritage that many of us sometimes take for granted.

Of the Loch Katrine area, Sir Walter Scott wrote:

"So wondrous wild, the whole might seem
The scenery of a fairy dream."

Throughout our history, such areas have dazzled visitors. Organisations such as Forestry and Land Scotland have been crucial in maintaining their

natural beauty and sustainability. Let us not take them for granted, let us get out, enjoy them and share them with the rest of the world for the next 100 years at least.

16:30

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): It has been very interesting to learn how Scotland's forestry has changed in the past century—not least in relation to my friend John Finnie's father's forestry horse, who I understand was called Jock.

The Forestry Act 1919 was introduced after world war one, and its impact in the following decade was quite incredible, with a total of 192,000 acres being planted by the Forestry Commission or privately via commission grants. That was about 7,700 hectares a year—not bad for a newly formed Forestry Commission in post-war circumstances. Unfortunately, that figure is greater than the Scottish Government's average since its planting targets were introduced in 2010.

On this centenary, we should take inspiration from the history of our forests, so I welcome the cabinet secretary's announcement today about commemorative planting. We now face a different challenge—that of climate emergency and ecological crisis. We should take motivation from the past, but we should make progress with the advantage of more robust science, technology and expertise. The cabinet secretary acknowledged that today.

Forestry is one of our natural allies against climate change. It offsets 23.6 per cent of our greenhouse gas emissions, and its sequestration potential must be carefully fostered, while being managed alongside other priorities such as flood prevention, drainage, biodiversity and, of course, the rural economy.

I was delighted that the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 saw Parliament agree to my amendment to include in the climate change plan policies and proposals on agroforestry. I strongly believe that agroforestry is a sustainable option for adaptation that will deliver wide-ranging benefits to farmers and be for the public good. It is better for animal welfare, for the condition of soils and water courses now and for future generations, for biodiversity corridors and networks, and for cost savings and income generation. Furthermore, work by Vivid Economics that was commissioned by WWF states that agroforestry could reduce required planting rates by about 2,000 to 3,000 hectares a year.

Community woodlands also deserve stronger Government support, given the benefits that they deliver across many portfolios, because people and woodlands flourish when we care for each other.

People come to woodland programmes to improve their physical health, and for mental wellbeing, recycling, education, work experience, conservation and for their love of woodlands.

In my South Scotland region, we are fortunate to have the Borders Forest Trust. It owns three areas of the southern uplands, which are thought of as the wild heart of southern Scotland. The trust is working with communities to achieve healthy, natural ecosystems that have not been seen in the south of Scotland for centuries on that landscape scale.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust describes ancient woodlands as

“vitaly important, irreplaceable reservoirs from which wildlife can begin to spread back into newly restored habitat thereby helping Scotland's ecosystems to recover from centuries of degradation.”

As other parts of the country do, the Scottish Borders struggles with protection, enhancement and expansion of ancient woodlands. Those special native woodlands provide the highest biodiversity value, but represent, I am sad to say, only 0.26 per cent of the total land area of the Borders, which is below the national average of less than 2 per cent. Can the cabinet secretary say today what targeted support can be offered to improve the ancient woodland coverage in the Borders and across Scotland?

More broadly, Scotland, as featured in our amendment, will not make its 2020 international biodiversity targets. Can the cabinet secretary explain when impetus will be put behind the post-2020 biodiversity action fund, including the contribution that our forestry and woodlands can make, so that we can effectively work together?

Nature is the basis of our socioeconomic system: without ecological stability, there is no economic stability. Diverse forestry expansion should be thought of as a solution. We do not have another century to get that right. We need immediate, accelerated and evidenced-based action, in order to deliver a rich tapestry of native woodlands and wild places that are cared for by local communities and landowners, working with us all to take on climate change.

16:35

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): It is well known that, in Scotland, we love our trees. In fact, once upon a time, we loved them so much that we were planting them everywhere, even on deep peat. Plantations such as those on the Forsinard flows were given by the London Government to the rich and famous as tax breaks. Trees were being planted—but not in the right places.

However, we have learned our lesson. Many of those trees are being felled and the water courses blocked, so that the much-needed water can return to the bog. In his blog, "Land Matters", Andy Wightman has told of Nigel Lawson's speech that put an end to that tax gravy train. Nigel Lawson said:

"But the present system cannot be justified. It enables top rate taxpayers in particular to shelter other income from tax, by setting it against expenditure on forestry, while the proceeds from any eventual sale are almost tax free. The time has come to bring it to an end."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 15 March 1988; Vol 129, c 1006.]

The Forestry Commission—which, after its functions were devolved to the Scottish Government this year, is now Forestry and Land Scotland—was set up after the first world war. In 1919, the need to expand the depleted forest estate was apparent, and the Forestry Commission acquired large expanses of agricultural land on which to plant trees. Approximately 4,700km² of Scotland's forests and woodland are publicly owned by the Scottish Government via Forestry and Land Scotland. That makes up the national forest estate. Forestry contributes almost £1 billion to the Scottish economy, and the industry employs more than 25,000 people.

In years gone by, planting has not hit targets, but last year it did: 22 million trees were planted in Scotland. That brought our woodland coverage to nearly 19 per cent, which is good compared to the rest of the UK. However, if we compare that with our European neighbours' coverage, there is still a way to go.

The situation is a far cry from the early 1980s, when controversial forestry decisions, such as the Earl of Seafield felling part of the ancient Abernethy forest in 1984, were made with the agreement of the Forestry Commission.

Tree felling can be an emotional experience, but tree planting has not been without controversy. In its preface by David Jenkins, the 1986 document by the Natural Environment Research Council, "Trees and wildlife in the Scottish uplands", says that

"The concern of foresters to integrate their management policy with the requirement of the rural community is obvious"

and that

"The concern is about integrating the need for timber with maintaining the richness of the Scottish ... countryside, of which forests are very much a part."

We are getting better at striking the balance between agricultural land and forestry, and farmers and landowners are planting more trees. If we are to keep hitting our planting targets, that needs to continue.

As was reported in the *New Scientist* in 1994, there is always hope of finding trees that we did not know were there. It said:

"The 'discovery' of 27,000 hectares of native woodlands in the Highlands has increased the size of Scotland's native forests by around 35 per cent."

Who knows where those trees were hiding? However, that was good news.

As the motion rightly mentions, the success of our woodland and forests is down in no small part to the people who work in the sector. I would like to hear from anybody in my constituency who knows of any lumberjills who work in the sector.

When the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee took evidence on the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill, it heard the strongly held view that the skills in the sector are so valuable that they absolutely cannot be lost. At the time, the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, Fergus Ewing, told the committee:

"we value the expertise of the staff very highly." — [Official Report, Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, 13 September 2017; c 26.]

In this year, when we celebrate the act's 100th anniversary, we should appreciate the people who work, and those who have worked and contributed to our wonderful forests and woodland all over Scotland. Today, we thank them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jamie Greene, after which we will move to closing speeches.

16:39

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

"I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree."

Those are the beautiful opening words of Joyce Kilmer's famous imaginatively named poem "Trees". Joyce was actually a man, but that is a whole other story that is not for today's debate.

Alfred Joyce Kilmer died in the first world war. There has been a lot of talk about the effect of war on trees. Mention has been made of the lumberjills and the great work that women did during the wars. Members have talked about the great importance of trees. In this debate to mark the 100th anniversary of the Forestry Act 1919, it is fitting that we are looking at the importance of our forestry estate and how we manage it.

I am proud to be a member of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, which has been heavily involved in considering much of the legislation to change the arrangements for forestry that has been introduced in the years since I entered Parliament. It was a privilege to work on

the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill. That was a fascinating journey, as well as a learning curve, for many of us.

The committee visit that sticks in my mind most is one to Mull, where we saw at first hand the work that is done in felling and management of trees. Of course, that visit provided an excellent opportunity for members to be photographed in hard hats and fluorescent jackets in front of a mountain of logs that had recently been felled. However, I was struck by the experience of meeting staff who work in the industry.

Our forestry industry provides impressive economic and employment opportunities. It contributes £285 million of gross value added to the Scottish economy every year, and it supports 30,000 jobs end to end. It strikes me that we should think about that.

On the committee's visit to Mull, I was told that it is a struggle to find drivers and operators of felling machinery. They are impressive pieces of kit, as anyone who has seen them in action will know. I recommend that anyone who has not done so look online at videos of the process in action, which show how speedy, efficient and impressive the felling machines are.

Technology is at the heart of managing today's forestry. Forklift truck drivers are being taken from factories in cities and being trained to operate the machines. The idea of leaving an inner-city factory with no windows, where the job involves moving pallets, and instead going into the great countryside to perform the vital function of managing our forestry really struck a chord with me. Are we doing enough as a Parliament to promote careers in forestry as viable options? Are we doing enough to give people the skills that they need to manage those multimillion-pound machines?

It is all very well to talk about planting, who owns what, who has planted what and what the targets are, but I would like to put a positive spin on the case that we should be promoting management of forestry and the opportunities in tourism and hospitality that forestry affords. Are we going into schools and colleges to talk about that? Are we doing enough as advocates of forestry, not just as a thing to admire in the recess, but as a provider of genuine employment opportunities?

We know all about the environmental positives of managing trees, and about the vital role that they play in flood prevention, sheltering wildlife and capturing carbon. We talk a lot about climate change, but we need to ask whether we are looking at our forestry through the right eyes. There is a lot to be positive about, but we cannot be complacent. As a Parliament, we will need to

monitor closely the recent legislative changes to how we manage forestry and land in the coming years.

I will close by quoting Kilmer's words again:

"Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are a man of poetry, Mr Greene. I learn something every day.

I call Colin Smyth to close for Labour.

16:43

Colin Smyth: Today's debate has been an opportunity not just to celebrate the contribution of forestry over the past 100 years but to look ahead at how we can build on the achievements of the past century. Scotland's ambitious planting targets are set to continue to transform a sector that has expanded so much in that time. That growth has delivered social, economic and environmental benefits for our communities but, in building on those achievements, we need to learn some of the lessons of the past. For example, we need to avoid inappropriate mass-scale planting and we should not plant on land with important environmental value, such as biodiverse habitats or peatlands, which capture greenhouse gases. We should also safeguard against any potential harm to other land-based sectors, such as tenant farming.

Given that agricultural and wider rural support is set to change regardless of whether we are in or out of the EU, we need to design a system that better supports integration and cohesion between agriculture and forestry and which encourages mixed land use.

Although forestry will undoubtedly play a crucial role in helping Scotland to achieve net zero emissions, we should be clear that increased forestry planting alone is not a panacea or an alternative to meaningful action to reduce emissions. Where forestry is used as part of a carbon-offsetting scheme, it cannot be used simply to take the edge off harmful emissions or to justify inaction.

It is also important to ensure that a focus on growing does not result in the neglect of existing woodlands. Native semi-natural woodlands are incredibly valuable, providing some of Scotland's most biodiverse habitats. However, due to decades of neglect, which my colleague Claudia Beamish highlighted in her speech, they still only make up less than 2 per cent of Scotland's land area. As well as planting new forests, we must protect and restore Scotland's ancient woodlands and the unique benefits that they provide and we must build on not only the economic and environmental value of our forests but the social

benefits of our land as a destination for leisure and exercise.

One key way to do that, as has been highlighted in the debate, is to support the development of more national parks in Scotland, particularly in areas with forested land, such as Galloway forest park. National parks help to develop many of the benefits that forestry provides across the board, with clear advantages for communities, local economies and our environment. Scotland has some of the most beautiful scenery and natural landscapes in the world, yet we have just two national parks—what a missed opportunity. The internationally recognised national park designation attracts tourists, creating jobs and growth in rural areas. It also helps to ensure that the forests in the park are well maintained, preserving and enhancing Scotland's natural capital and biodiversity. That is just one of the reasons why we should be expanding the number of those parks, which is what our communities are calling for.

In his contribution, Mike Rumbles did not seem to understand that the campaign for new national parks in Scotland is a bottom-up campaign but we need—and he fails to grasp this—legislation from the Parliament to support those local campaigns and take them forward. The only top-down approach appears to be the one where Mr Rumbles is under the thumb of the cabinet secretary.

There are few sectors that can provide as wide a range of benefits as forestry does for our communities. We have seen impressive growth in the forestry sector since the Forestry Commission was established 100 years ago but, as the sector continues to grow, we need to properly balance the economic, social and environmental benefits for the support and benefit of our local communities.

16:47

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

The strain of world war one took its toll on our country. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost and our country's resources were exhausted. Timber, as we have heard, was vital for the war effort and we had no choice but to deplete our forests to an all-time low. Indeed, that continued in world war two. Many old beech trees that are still growing were earmarked for the construction of .303 rifles in world war two and still bear the War Office crow's foot symbol from when they were requisitioned.

Over a hundred years after the first world war, work continues to encourage our forests across

Scotland and the UK. Last year, the Scottish Conservatives were delighted to support the full devolution of forestry to Scotland. More powers mean more responsibility placed on the Scottish Government to maintain the national forest estate and to meet the tree planting targets. Let me be clear—I am very pleased that the Scottish Government has exceeded its planting target for 2018 but, sadly, I have to point out that one good year does not undo 10 years of missed targets.

Prior to 2018, the Scottish Government missed its planting targets for 10 years. That means that we have lost the opportunity to plant 30,000 hectares of forestry. The result is that in 2035, as we have heard from many of the industry experts, our timber production will fall way behind what is required. The impact of this decade of failure is there for all to see. Scotland has the biggest area of forestry in the UK, but we are nowhere near to having as much forestry as other European countries. That means that Scotland and the UK as a whole are reliant on importing timber. That must change, so I am pleased that the planting target is rising and I will continue to encourage the Government to make sure that it is met.

However, I also believe that, as part of achieving that target, it is wrong for the Government to consider selling off our forests and the national forest estate. As I have said before in the chamber, in the past 20 years, the Scottish Government has disposed of more land than it has acquired. That needs to stop. The forest estate is a national asset, and it should not be sold to fund rising costs. If that continues, there is a possibility that Scotland will have no forests in national ownership.

I would like to point out some of the important things that we have heard this afternoon. Colin Smyth made important points on national parks helping to improve the environment and encourage native woodlands but, as he also indicated, we also need commercial forestry. Peter Chapman reminded us that forestry has been declining since the middle ages, and that needs to be reversed. John Finnie talked about his experience of working with forestry horses. I did not know that he had done that—unless I have misunderstood. He also talked about how the land is owned, although I think that it is more important to talk about how it is used.

Mike Rumbles also pointed out that we are behind Europe, and I have explained why. Stewart Stevenson reminded us that, when he was a minister with responsibility for trees, he saw them as “visual poetry”. I will maybe just leave that one there. Finlay Carson mentioned the importance of national parks, and I commend him and his predecessor for all their work on that and on forestry in their area. Bruce Crawford mentioned

that forests are our heritage and perhaps our saviour, but he also said that we need to control the invasive non-native species that sometimes creep into our forests. That is entirely right. Rhododendrons are stretching out and, in some cases, killing our forestry. Claudia Beamish also mentioned that she saw trees as a way of addressing climate change; she is so right. Gail Ross spoke eloquently about planting trees in inappropriate areas being so wrong; again, she is so right. Jamie Greene talked about the importance of forestry management and mountains of logs—of course I would approve of that.

The world may have moved on since the Forestry Act 1919, but the challenge to restore forests and woodlands across Scotland must go on. We need more forests to grow our sustainable timber industry, as a place for recreation and leisure, and, most crucial of all, to combat the threat of climate change.

Our need to grow the national forest estate has never been bigger, and the pressure on the Scottish Government to deliver that has never been greater. The Scottish Government has set itself ambitious targets and we need to meet them. In Scotland, we cannot afford to allow them to fail.

The Conservatives will support the Government motion and the Labour amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Fergus Ewing to close for the Government.

16:53

Fergus Ewing: This debate was intended to provide an opportunity to members from all parties to pay tribute to those who had the foresight 100 years ago to establish the Forestry Commission, and to all of those who contributed to its success over the intervening century.

I am pleased that many members, starting with Mr Chapman and Mr Smyth, accepted and took that opportunity and paid tribute to those people's enormous efforts. It is probably impossible for any of us to do full justice to their extraordinary endeavour, foresight and ambition. The inception of a forestry commission was seen as a radical thing by leading landowners, ironically, who were the proponents of what was, at that time, a radical act that was resisted in some quarters.

The work of the Forestry Commission has proceeded apace over the 100 years and a huge number of people have paid tribute to it. I did not know that Mr Finnie's father played a part in it, which is fascinating. He said that his father "operated" a horse, which is not normally what one says one does on a horse. I will maybe just leave that one aside. He obviously has a close family

connection to the Forestry Commission, as do I—my late uncle worked with the Forestry Commission after he came back from the second world war, during which he had been incarcerated in the Changi prisoner of war camp.

The work done by so many individuals has played an enormous part in the tapestry, history and culture of Scotland, and it is right and fitting that we have all paid tribute to those individuals today. However, the finger of time moves on, and we need to look forward rather than back.

I am grateful to those members who welcomed the fact that we have achieved our first forestry target, but I acknowledge that in the past we have fallen short; there is no point in ignoring facts that do not suit one's particular agenda. I was determined that we would move forward and achieve the targets, and that is what happened, but I am by no means complacent. There are many challenges. As many members will know from their own activities, growing trees is not like going to a shop and purchasing confectionery. The nursery stock needs to be planted effectively, but contractors are in short supply and the process is very weather dependent—the wrong weather can make skilled work impossible. The availability of nursery stock will be a particular challenge in the coming year, although not in the succeeding year. All those things have to be taken into account, and there is the omnipresent threat of tree disease, against which we must be constantly vigilant.

I pay tribute in particular to all the people who work for Scottish Forestry and Forestry and Land Scotland. Together, they are tackling a cornucopia of challenges and have succeeded nonetheless in enabling us to achieve our target.

To answer the point from John Finnie and other members that we need to raise the level of our ambitions, I entirely agree: I would like us to increase our ambitions further. John Finnie and his colleagues can be absolutely assured that, as long as I am around—I am sure that they hope that that will be for an extraordinarily long time—I will do exactly what they want in terms of aiming to increase those targets further. I look forward to working harmoniously, as always, with my colleagues in the Green Party.

In that context, I am pleased that we have increased the target this year from 10,000 to 12,000 hectares. I have also managed to persuade my good colleague and friend Derek Mackay that an additional £5 million will be found for that—

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work (Derek Mackay): When did I say that?

Fergus Ewing: I was extremely grateful. He must be a great friend of mine, because he

previously provided an additional £5 million for the timber transport fund. That fund was necessary to improve not only roads but water connections—there was some rail work too—in order to enhance our ability to extract timber.

So much of our timber is landlocked—it is entrapped—because there is no adequate transport system to extract it. It then becomes liable to wind blow and it is very difficult or impossible to extract, so it becomes valueless. The timeous extraction of wood is another relevant factor.

I am acutely aware that, at present, the commercial sector, and the sawmill sector in particular, is facing extraordinary financial pressure. There has been a downturn in the construction sector in the UK, which has fed into the timber sawmill sector—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Can members keep the chatter down, please?

Fergus Ewing: I engage regularly with the sawmill sector—I met the industry leadership group this week. I say to members that they should take some time to visit and communicate with the businesses in their constituencies in order to better understand what I see as an emerging challenge.

I am not going to say that all the problems are directly related to Brexit, but some deferment of investment has certainly played a part. In addition, the importation of 10 million to 12 million tonnes of diseased wood from Germany has been a factor. However, I underscore to all members that there is currently a very serious risk to the sawmill sector, on which we rely as the market for our productive species.

How am I doing for time, Presiding Officer? I have used up so much of my time in praising my friends in the Green Party that I have very little time left to devote to other issues. There are so many other issues, but how can they be more important? I do not know. I see that Patrick Harvie is joining in the general merriment of the occasion, is he not? There we are. Who writes this stuff anyway?

Let me be serious. The debate has provided us with an excellent opportunity—which we have taken—to pay tribute to those who serve in Scottish Forestry and FLS in our five conservancies and in forestry and land management offices around Scotland. They work on the land and in the fresh air. They plant, grow and fell the trees. They do the work that we talk about—they do it; we talk about it. Now and for the century to come—or certainly for as long as I am around—Scotland's forestry, which is an essential driver of the economy and means of tackling

climate change, will receive the attention that it deserves.

Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of three legislative consent motions. I invite Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S5M-19630, on the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill, introduced in the House of Lords on 5 June 2019, relating to ticket touting, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

Sentencing (Pre-consolidation Amendments) Bill

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I invite Humza Yousaf to move motion S5M-19628, on the Sentencing (Pre-consolidation Amendments) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Sentencing (Pre-consolidation Amendments) Bill, introduced in the House of Lords on 22 May 2019, relating to the transfer of community orders and suspended sentence orders imposed by courts in England and Wales to Scotland, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Humza Yousaf*]

Domestic Abuse Bill

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I invite Humza Yousaf to move motion S5M-19630, on the Domestic Abuse Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Domestic Abuse Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 16 July 2019, relating to amendments to the law of Scotland concerning extra-territorial jurisdiction over certain offences committed outside the UK by a UK national or habitual resident of Scotland in order to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Humza Yousaf*]

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

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-19671, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 5 November 2019—

after

followed by Stage 1 Debate: UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill

insert

followed by Election to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body—[*Maurice Golden*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S5M-19654, on the establishment of a private bill committee.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament shall establish a committee of the Parliament as follows:

Name of Committee: Solicitors in the Supreme Courts of Scotland (Amendment) Bill Committee.

Remit: To consider matters relating to the Solicitors in the Supreme Courts of Scotland (Amendment) Bill.

Duration: Until the Bill is passed or rejected, falls or is withdrawn.

Number of members: 4.

Convenership: The Convener will be a member of the Scottish National Party and the Deputy Convener will be a member of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party.

Membership: Christine Grahame, John Mason, Bill Bowman, Monica Lennon.—[*Maurice Golden*]

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

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-19631.4, in the name of Colin Smyth, which seeks to amend motion S5M-19631, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the centenary of the Forestry Act 1919, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-19631, in the name of Fergus Ewing, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the opportunity to mark 100 years since the Forestry Act 1919; notes the progress made since 1919 in increasing Scotland's forest cover from 5% to nearly 19%; appreciates the contribution made by the men and women who have worked in forestry in Scotland, including those from Commonwealth countries who were members of forestry units in Scotland during and after the Second World War; acknowledges the importance of forests and woodland to the rural economy, to the health and wellbeing of communities and especially to the environment; recognises that forests and woodland are among Scotland's most important natural assets in helping to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045; resolves to encourage everyone to get involved in planting more trees over the next 100 years; celebrates the contribution of the forestry sector trade unions; recognises the potential that sustainable management of diverse forest and woodland has in meeting biodiversity targets post 2020; notes the importance of planting taking place in appropriate areas; recognises the contribution that national parks make to protecting forestry and widening the natural environment, and therefore believes that new national parks should be designated.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on the three legislative consent motions. The question is, that motions S5M-19629, S5M-19628 and S5M-19630 be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill, introduced in the House of Lords on 5 June 2019, relating to ticket touting, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Sentencing (Pre-consolidation Amendments) Bill, introduced in the House of Lords on 22 May 2019, relating to the transfer of community orders and suspended sentence orders imposed by courts in England and Wales to Scotland, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Domestic Abuse Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 16 July 2019, relating to amendments to the law of Scotland concerning extra-territorial jurisdiction over certain offences committed outside the UK by a UK national

or habitual resident of Scotland in order to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-19654, in the name of Graeme Dey, on the establishment of a private bill committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament shall establish a committee of the Parliament as follows:

Name of Committee: Solicitors in the Supreme Courts of Scotland (Amendment) Bill Committee.

Remit: To consider matters relating to the Solicitors in the Supreme Courts of Scotland (Amendment) Bill.

Duration: Until the Bill is passed or rejected, falls or is withdrawn.

Number of members: 4.

Convenership: The Convener will be a member of the Scottish National Party and the Deputy Convener will be a member of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party.

Membership: Christine Grahame, John Mason, Bill Bowman, Monica Lennon.

Meeting closed at 17:02.

Correction

Nicola Sturgeon has identified an error in her contribution and provided the following correction.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):

At col 17, paragraph 4—

Original text—

To set the record straight, during the planning or business case stage, Aberdeen City Council made no approach to the Scottish Government, Historic Environment Scotland or Creative Scotland.

Corrected text—

To set the record straight, during the planning or business case stage, Aberdeen City Council made no approach to the Scottish Government or Historic Environment Scotland.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba