



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 10 January 2023

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 10 January 2023

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Susan Henderson, Inverclyde United Reformed Churches.

The Rev Susan Henderson (Inverclyde United Reformed Churches): Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the opportunity to address you.

Ten days ago, the clock struck midnight and we all wished those around us a happy new year. Some might have decided that, to have a happy new year, they would need to make changes to the way they live, and so resolutions were made. However, 10 days on, how many of those resolutions have been kept and how many are already broken? How many of us chose not to make any resolutions this year because we know that they become unrealistic once we are out of the holiday season and the stresses of our everyday lives are back with us again?

During the Christmas season, churches around the world lit candles, which symbolise hope, peace, joy and love as we wait for the Christ light to return to us once more and as we wait for the Christ child to be born in us. On Christmas day, we lit the centre candle—the Christ light—as we rejoiced in our saviour's birth. That candle will remain with our churches throughout the year as a reminder of the hope, peace, joy and love that we long for.

This year, most churches are reading through the gospel of Matthew. Matthew shows us a Jesus who looked to those in the margins, and who challenges us to give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty and clothes to the naked; to welcome the stranger; to take care of the sick; and to visit those in prison, because we can see Christ in the faces of those people. In other words, we are challenged to spread hope, peace, joy and love to one another in our communities and in our world.

This year, have we already packed the hope, peace, joy and love away with the Christmas decorations, only to be remembered when we unpack them all again next year, or are they like forgotten bought presents still at the back of a cupboard waiting to be wrapped and gifted? Can

we find our own Christ light, whatever that might mean to you, to keep burning throughout the year to remind us to bring hope, peace, joy and love into the lives of those who are marginalised, those who are sick and those who hunger and thirst for a better life and to help us with our own resolutions to bring a happy new year for ourselves and to everyone around us?

Business Motion

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-07455, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to today's business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for Tuesday 10 January 2023—
after

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: NHS Winter Pressures

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

6.00 pm Decision Time—[George Adam].

The Presiding Officer: I call Sandesh Gulhane to speak to and move amendment S6M-07455.2.

14:04

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): Today, we saw the worst-ever eight and 12-hour waits in accident and emergency. In the week ending 18 December 2022, we saw the worst-ever four-hour waits. The average number of beds occupied per day due to delayed discharges is also at a record high.

Almost every indicator of NHS Scotland's performance has worsened—some to their worst-ever level. Hundreds of thousands of Scots are waiting for treatment. This is a national emergency. People are dying unnecessarily. National health service staff are burning out because they are going above and beyond, but they cannot cope. The crisis in our NHS should be the priority for the Parliament because it is a priority for the people.

In the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care's own words, this was always going to be the "hardest winter" that the NHS has ever seen. However, with the rhetoric came no action. I have been warning of how bad this winter is going to get, yet there was no prioritisation by the Government to allocate time for a proper debate in the Parliament prior to the recess. Today, a ministerial statement on the NHS is being slotted into the parliamentary business timetable at short notice, with not enough time allocated and not enough opportunity for members' scrutiny. The

decision to slot the statement in came at very short notice.

What has the Scottish Government given priority to in the midst of the NHS crisis? The first Scottish parliamentary debate of 2023 is not about our treasured NHS but about Scottish independence. That is a disgrace. It is not the priority of the people of Scotland and not a good use of parliamentary time. I have therefore lodged an amendment to scrap that divisive debate and extend the time that has been allocated to the ministerial statement on NHS winter pressures by 40 minutes to allow members to raise their concerns and those of their constituents and hold the cabinet secretary to account on his failing NHS recovery plan. We will also support and welcome a full debate as Labour's amendment requests.

Those who vote against the amendments are voting to prioritise independence over Scottish people dying unnecessarily. [Interruption.] Presiding Officer, the Scottish National Party does not seem to care. What we hear there is the SNP not caring.

I move amendment S6M-07455.2, to leave out from "5.00 pm" to end and insert:

followed by Scottish Government Debate: People's Right to Choose - Respecting Scotland's Democratic Mandate".

14:07

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Today, the number of patients waiting more than 12 hours in emergency departments has hit its highest ever level. The head of the doctors' union said at the weekend that Scotland's hospitals are "not safe" for patients. In a few weeks, nurses will be forced to walk out of hospitals because the Scottish Government is more interested in clapping them than paying them. We are in the middle of a full-blown crisis that is threatening patients' safety and putting people into unbearable circumstances.

When the people of Scotland look to the Parliament this afternoon for a response, what will they see? They will see another debate on a referendum, another exercise in internal party management and another excursion into creative avoidance from the real problems that Scotland faces. The Parliament should reflect people's priorities not just those of the governing parties.

I welcome the fact that the Government has agreed to make a statement on the NHS, but there should also be a full debate on the NHS crisis. We lodged a business motion to hold an NHS debate before Christmas instead of the SNP's proposed debate on its general election strategy, and we will do so again today.

I move amendment S6M-07455.1, after “NHS Winter Pressures”, to delete

“followed by Scottish Government
Debate: People’s Right to Choose - Respecting Scotland’s Democratic Mandate”

and insert

“followed by Scottish Government
Debate: A New NHS Recovery Plan”.

14:09

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): I wish everyone in the chamber a happy new year.

With that said, I have to move on to what Mr Gulhane has said and say that I will take no lectures from a member of the Conservative Party about who is caring and who is not when he represents a political party that has proved not to care about the people of Scotland over the years. When the Opposition asked for the Government to make a statement on health at the end of last year, I said that I would bring that back to the Parliament, and I have made sure that it is the first thing that we discuss, because the NHS and will continue to be a priority of this Government.

However, I am only too happy to talk about the benefits of independence. As I said before recess, I will never apologise for encouraging this Parliament to debate the right of the people of Scotland to choose their own future. Indeed, it is somewhat ironic that the Tories are seeking to deny us a democratic debate that will highlight how the current constitutional settlement denies democracy in Scotland.

Frankly, the case for the people of Scotland to be given the choice of and chance for a better future is becoming stronger every day. I remind you of what I said at the end of last year. We are living in a country, led by the Conservatives in Westminster, with inflation running at 10 per cent and household incomes predicted to fall to 2014 levels. The economy is in recession and people face the horrific choice between heating and eating this winter. Millions face eye-watering increases in household costs in 2023 and Brexit is, of course, compounding all of that by creating labour shortages and trade barriers, higher business costs and lost tax income.

It is no wonder that the Tories do not want this Parliament to debate and agree that this is the time for the people of Scotland to choose independence and a future so that we have the opportunity—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Members!

George Adam: —to create and make our own decisions, allowing this Parliament to be able to provide that better future for Scotland.

I am more surprised by Labour seeking to obstruct the debate. We have worked well over the past three or four months and I would have thought that Labour would have been interested in debating Anas Sarwar’s six pledges for reform in Holyrood, which include the view—which I share—that the Scottish people are sovereign and have the right to determine the form of Government best suited to our needs.

In my opinion, Britain is broken beyond repair and it is now time for the people of Scotland to decide their future.

The Presiding Officer: The first question is, that amendment S6M-07455.2, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, which seeks to amend business motion S6M-07455, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to today’s business, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will be a brief suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

14:12

Meeting suspended.

14:17

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The first question is, that amendment S6M-07455.2, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

Before I close the vote, I call Kaukab Stewart to cast a proxy vote on behalf of Stuart McMillan.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Stuart McMillan would vote no.

The Presiding Officer: The clerks will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)

Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhan (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)

Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 30, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-07455.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend business motion S6M-07455, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to today's business, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

Before I close the vote, I call Kaukab Stewart to cast a proxy vote on behalf of Stuart McMillan.

Kaukab Stewart: On behalf of Stuart McMillan, I vote no.

The Presiding Officer: The clerks will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

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

Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caitness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 55, Against 69, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-07455, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to today's business, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

Before I close the vote, I call Kaukab Stewart to cast a proxy vote on behalf of Stuart McMillan.

Kaukab Stewart: On behalf of Stuart McMillan, I vote no.

The Presiding Officer: The clerks will ensure that that is recorded.

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was not able to connect to the digital voting platform. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)

Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)

Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 99, Against 25, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for Tuesday 10 January 2023—
 after

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: NHS Winter Pressures

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

6.00 pm Decision Time—[George Adam.]

Topical Question Time

14:24

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is topical question time.

Hypothermia (Ambulance Call-outs)

1. **Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that, during freezing temperatures in December, ambulances were called out to 800 people with hypothermia. (S6T-01077)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): We share concerns that the vulnerable, especially older people, will struggle to keep warm this winter. We are committed to doing everything that we can, in our power, to address the energy cost crisis, which is why we announced in our budget statement on 15 December last year that we will be allocating a further £20 million to the fuel insecurity fund to ensure that it can continue to provide support to those in the greatest need in 2023-24.

That follows on from our decision, as part of the emergency budget review in November, to double our fund to £20 million for the current financial year. Those additional moneys have been distributed to our three current fuel insecurity fund delivery partners so that the immediate crisis support reaches those on the ground without delay.

The United Kingdom Government's current energy price cap of £2,500 per annum, on average—due to rise to £3,000 from next April—still leaves energy costs at an unsustainable level for far too many households. I would encourage anybody still struggling with their energy bills to contact Home Energy Scotland, which will be able to help with energy advice.

Carol Mochan: I am sure that the Government understands that there are people in this country who have been switching off their heating almost entirely throughout the winter so far, due to fear that they simply cannot afford it. It is clear that the Tories are the architects of this dreadful cost of living crisis. The sooner that they are replaced with a UK Labour Government, the better.

It is important, though, to focus on what we can do in this Parliament. I am aware of the fuel insecurity fund, which was increased to deal with the challenges faced by our most vulnerable. However, will the Government review the fund and assess whether the money that is available for families and older people in our communities is actually getting to them—we have heard from constituents that that may not be happening in

good time—and whether it is close to enough, when the lowest temperatures since 2010 have been recorded in parts of Scotland?

Humza Yousaf: Carol Mochan is absolutely right. The Conservatives are the architects of the cost crisis that is affecting so many people. The cost crisis is a public health crisis—*[Interruption.]* I am not sure why we are hearing groans from the Conservative benches, when they are responsible for the public health crisis that so many households face due to more than a decade of austerity.

My colleague Shona Robison, who is sat here to my left, is working hard in relation to the fuel insecurity fund and other funds that are available. Carol Mochan will know that we are making progress in relation to the winter heating payment and the pension-age winter heating payment. If eligibility criteria can be expanded, this Government will always keep an open mind, so that we can help as many families as possible.

I am sure that Carol Mochan will agree that, instead of mitigating the constant austerity and cost of living crisis enabled by the Conservative Government, it would be far better if we had the power in our hands to take the necessary measures to save families from the impacts of the cost crisis.

Carol Mochan: I reiterate my agreement that the Tories at Westminster have created this cost of living crisis. My point would be that they will pay for that at the ballot box next year, which will help to address the crisis.

Following yesterday's briefing from the First Minister and the cabinet secretary, it is clear—if it was not already—that the Scottish National Party has lost control of the health service. Record numbers of people are waiting more than 12 hours at accident emergency and, crucially, nurses and social care workers are feeling the strain of poor pay and underfunding of services. Patients are suffering as a consequence.

Our national health service is our proudest possession. Staff and patients are concerned. How can the cabinet secretary be confident in the slightest that, when the temperatures drop again to dangerously low levels, vulnerable individuals suffering from hypothermia will even be able to receive treatment and attention as quickly as they need it?

Humza Yousaf: Our NHS is our most prized and valuable asset, and I pay tribute to every single health and social care worker who is providing exceptional care in these most challenging of times. I will say more in the ministerial statement that is due straight after topical question time.

I disagree with Carol Mochan that we are not investing in our health service. We are. Front-line health spending is higher here in Scotland than in other parts of the UK—a record £19 billion for 2023-24. We have record staffing levels. We also care about our staff, whom we value. That is why I say to Carol Mochan that, because of our meaningful dialogue, Scotland is the only part of the UK not to have had nurses or ambulance drivers on strike, which is very different to the situation in Labour-run Wales.

The Presiding Officer: There is much interest in this afternoon's business. As ever, having concise questions and responses will enable more members' voices to be heard.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Concerns have been raised that a cold winter, coupled with the Tory-created energy crisis, will mean that large numbers of people will experience hypothermia or other serious issues linked to low body temperature. *[Interruption.]*

Does the cabinet secretary have concerns that unless the Tory Government takes real action to put money back in people's pockets, such as by matching the Scottish child payment and properly supporting people on low incomes every winter, we will only see the number of people who experience hypothermia grow as more of them face the choice between heating and eating?

Humza Yousaf: Presiding Officer, I am astonished that in response to Emma Harper's reasonable and rational question we are hearing complete denial from members on the Conservative benches about the real harm that they are causing people up and down this country through their complete mismanagement of the economy. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

Humza Yousaf: They are responsible for the cost crisis and they should hang their heads in shame.

I could not agree more with Emma Harper, and I share her concerns. A series of UK Government welfare reforms has eroded the real-terms value of reserved benefits. I am deeply concerned about the UK Government's welfare policies as the rising costs of essentials are far harder for people on the lowest incomes to afford.

We have repeatedly called for additional funding to increase social security benefits to support low-income households this winter, including a £25 per week uplift to universal credit and means-tested legacy benefits, as well as an end to the benefit cap and the two-child limit.

Teacher Strikes

2. Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to mitigate the impact of recent teacher strikes on children's education. (S6T-01078)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The best way of mitigating that impact is to avoid industrial action. Strikes in our schools are in the interests of no one—least of all pupils, parents and carers who have already faced significant disruption over the past three years.

I remain absolutely committed to working closely with our union and local government partners to try to reach a deal on teachers' pay, which must be fair and affordable for all concerned. I am in regular dialogue with the unions and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and spoke to them as recently as Friday 6 January.

As Mr Kerr will be aware, the provision of education in Scotland is the responsibility of local authorities. However, I have previously made clear that wherever strikes occur local authorities should undertake individual school risk assessments based on the availability of staff, with schools remaining open or remote learning facilities being provided wherever possible.

Stephen Kerr: I am not sure that I heard a single answer in that long statement from the cabinet secretary. Neither am I sure that I heard anything that will bring comfort to Scotland's parents, carers or, indeed, the most important people: the pupils, especially those in the senior phase who are preparing for their important exams.

The cabinet secretary is right that the obvious mitigation is to end the dispute, but the dispute was going on before last April. She has said in the media—

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): You have made no suggestions to the Government to offer to help to end the strike.

Stephen Kerr: You are the Government.

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Kerr.

Stephen Kerr: You might be a shabby Government, but you are the Government.

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Kerr. Sit down, please.

I advise all members that I am chairing the session. I would be grateful if we could hear the member when he is speaking.

Stephen Kerr: The cabinet secretary has said in the media that there is room for negotiation and

scope for settlement. What is in scope? When will the strikes end? Was the cabinet secretary in the negotiating room yesterday?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The meeting that was held yesterday was a meeting of the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers, which Government ministers do not attend, but Government officials were there. As I have said, I was in the room with representatives of the trade unions and COSLA on Friday.

There have been a number of constructive talks recently, particularly those held on Friday and Monday, for which I thank trade union and COSLA colleagues. If Mr Kerr will forgive me, I will not go into the detail of those meetings. That is not just a decision of the Scottish Government; trade union colleagues would not thank me if I went into the details of private negotiations. That is not the way to settle the detailed agreement that we will need to come to.

Of course, we are considering all options to resolve the dispute, looking at scope for compromise. However, as I have stated to trade union colleagues on several occasions, the Scottish Government has a fixed budget that is already allocated for this year and it has been eroded by inflation—no thanks to the UK Government for that. We will work to do everything that we can to resolve the dispute but it is fair to say that negotiations will have to continue, as some distance remains between us.

Stephen Kerr: Scotland's parents, carers and pupils will be astonished—why on earth was the cabinet secretary not even in the room? How on earth can there be a negotiation or a resolution if the cabinet secretary does not even negotiate? That is typical. Teachers are on strike for the first time in 40 years because the SNP Government has repeatedly let them down. The teachers do not want to strike; she is letting teachers and pupils down.

I have one more question to ask, so let me see if I can get a specific answer. Will the cabinet secretary set out one practical idea that she and her Government have to help pupils to catch up and avoid falling further behind?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I gave some of the details of that in my first answer. There are many areas where, because of the impact of Covid, we have remote learning initiatives, such as e-Sgoil, that are assisted by national agencies, although the responsibility for remote learning also lies—quite rightly—with the schools.

On the day when UK Government ministers are standing up in Westminster and bringing in anti-trade union legislation, I will take no lectures from Mr Kerr or any other Conservative member of this Parliament who says that we should be doing

more to settle disputes. We know what happens when the Tories are in power—we can see that at Westminster. Compare that to what we have done here in Scotland, where we are having constructive discussions. That is how we solve disputes.

Mr Kerr's questions today show a lack of understanding of how the SNCT works and of negotiations and dispute resolution. I will take no lessons from him because of that and in particular because of the anti-trade union legislation once again being taken through Westminster by the Conservatives.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for her update. Strikes are in no one's best interest, but industrial action is an essential part of a fair and just society and economy, which has deep roots in Scotland's industrial history. Does the cabinet secretary share my incredulosity at the brass neck of the Tories who, as she has stated, are trying to pass new anti-trade union laws? The SNP will have no truck with such laws.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Kaukab Stewart sets out the real concerns that we should all have about some of the legislation being proposed by the UK Government in relation to trade unions. I have enormous respect for the important role of trade unions in our society. I commend the role of the teaching unions, the professional associations and the strength of feeling of their members. I am exceptionally careful to listen to that and take that on board.

Once again, Kaukab Stewart is quite right to point out the brass neck of the Scottish Conservatives' bringing such a question to Parliament on a day when the Conservatives are introducing anti-trade union legislation at Westminster.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The most recent pay offer was sent to the teaching unions at the last minute—quite literally—yet that offer had sat on the cabinet secretary's desk for 3.5 weeks. That was seven weeks ago. With schools closed across the country, and many more days of strikes to come, when will the cabinet secretary sanction a new offer?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I go back to the point that I have already made: the Government has a fixed budget that is already allocated and that has been eroded by inflation. Although it is easy for Mr Marra to stand up and suggest that the Government should come up with a new offer, he needs to understand the implications of that and the fact that the money would have to be found from elsewhere in the education budget. When people demand that the Government simply "sort it" by putting a new offer on the table, they have to

realise the implications of that and take some responsibility for them.

As I have said, constructive talks have been happening over the past few days. I look forward to those continuing over the weeks ahead and to the further discussions that I will have with trade union colleagues and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to see if the dispute can be brought to a resolution as speedily as possible, because this situation is not in the best interests of Scotland's children and young people.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The cabinet secretary has said that she will take no lessons today, but the trouble is that no pupils in Scotland are getting any lessons today because of a strike that this Government cannot resolve. The education secretary seems to be very chilled out and relaxed—teachers are on strike and pupils are going without an education, but she is incredibly relaxed and is taking no action to resolve the strike. I will follow up on what Michael Marra asked: is the cabinet secretary saying that there will be no new offer to teachers?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: What I have said and will say again is that constructive talks are ongoing. We are open to considering options that will resolve the dispute and are looking at the scope to see where there is compromise. There will have to be compromise not just from the Scottish Government but from all involved in the dispute. We will of course look very carefully to see what can be done, and we will leave no stone unturned to try and do that as quickly as possible. No one wants to see strike action in our schools, and I appreciate that that includes our teachers, but the stark financial reality that the Government is in makes preventing that exceptionally difficult. We will continue to do everything that we can to bring the situation to a speedy resolution with COSLA and trade union colleagues.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical questions.

Point of Order

14:41

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The First Minister held a press conference yesterday where all the substantive plans that will be addressed in the next item of business were discussed. Given that my amendment to extend the time allowed for the ministerial statement and questions was not agreed to, I ask that we move straight to questions to allow greater scrutiny of the cabinet secretary's responses and the few details in the statement to be discussed.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I am aware that the First Minister, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and the deputy chief medical officer provided a public media briefing on national health service winter pressures yesterday. There is sufficient additional detail in this afternoon's statement, and I will allow it to be delivered. I continue to pay close attention to these matters, and of course, I am determined to ensure that the Parliament's position is respected.

National Health Service (Winter Pressures)

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is a statement by Humza Yousaf, who will give an update on national health service winter pressures. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:42

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): I wish to update the Parliament on the extraordinary pressures that our national health service faces this winter, and on the measures that the Scottish Government is taking to address them.

Let me begin by stating a simple fact: this is the single most challenging winter that the NHS in Scotland has ever faced. Our NHS and its committed workforce are facing a perfect storm of intense pressures, which is leading to extreme difficulty, disruption and delays across the service.

We suspect that this especially challenging time for the NHS will continue for the coming weeks and, as I have said previously, the full recovery of our NHS will take not weeks or months, but years.

Presiding Officer, I take this opportunity to thank once again our incredible NHS and social care staff for continuing to provide exceptional care in the most difficult of circumstances. Our entire health and social care system faces the continuing impacts of the pandemic—the biggest challenge that our NHS has ever faced in its 74-year existence.

Covid remains a pressure on our health system, with the most recent statistics showing that Covid cases are at their highest level since the summer. In the week ending 1 January, there were more than 1,200 patients in hospital with Covid-19, which is a 15 per cent increase from the week ending on Christmas day, and is double the number of patients from four weeks ago, when there were more than 600 Covid patients in hospital.

Recent flu admissions have been about three times higher than emergency admissions due to Covid, and cases of Strep A and other respiratory viruses have been rising. Challenges around delayed discharge of patients also continue to impact by driving up accident and emergency waiting times.

Overall pressures on the health system are significant. Last week, the latest management information showed that hospital bed occupancy

across Scotland was over 95 per cent. Some sense of the intense pressure that is being felt can be also seen in the almost 100,000 calls to NHS 24 over the two four-day breaks of the festive period. That is the highest festive-period demand in over a decade. Traffic in December to the NHS Inform website and the symptom checker was at its highest-ever level, with 12.7 million page views.

The impact on the Scottish Ambulance Service has also been significant. It dealt with more than 16,000 emergency incidents last week. That is 11 per cent more than the average of the previous four weeks.

Although the situation highlights the significant levels of demand that we face, it also profiles the innovative ways in which we are seeking to tackle the issue through providing effective triage and supporting hospitals and social care settings.

However, the challenge is significant. The seasonal pressures come against the backdrop of the United Kingdom Government's mishandling of both Brexit and the nation's finances, which have had dire consequences for Scotland's social care sector in particular.

Although we fully acknowledge the multiple difficulties that we face, the Government is determined to continue taking action to alleviate pressure on our NHS and social care. I am convinced that we should pursue a whole-system approach to tackling the issues and to supporting, through all parts of the Government, the NHS and social care through the coming critical months.

Last Friday, the First Minister chaired a meeting of the Scottish Government resilience room—SGoRR—to determine the next steps in addressing the unprecedented pressures across the NHS. As well as ministers, senior representatives from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the NHS, integration joint boards and the Scottish Ambulance Service attended the meeting. A number of measures that are being taken to alleviate pressures on the system were reviewed. The measures include use of flow navigation centres as part of the redesign of urgent care; the hospital at home service; and Ambulance Service staff providing treatment, where appropriate, to help people to avoid hospital admission. Additional actions will now be rolled out across the health and social care system.

I can today outline a further course of action to unlock additional capacity to alleviate the pressure on the system from delayed discharges. As I have mentioned, delayed discharges and their impacts on patients continue to be a significant issue. The problem has been exacerbated by increases in staff absences due to self-isolation requirements and sickness, and the number of care home places has been impacted by home closures, too.

There is no doubting that high inflation and high energy costs have significantly impacted on a sector that was already facing multiple challenges. I know that teams throughout the country are working exceptionally hard to ensure that people receive the right care in the right setting, but it is a fact that, at present, there are currently more than 1,700 people in hospital who do not need to be there for clinical reasons, and whose interests are not best served by their being there, because care packages that would allow them to be discharged to go home or to a care home are simply not in place.

To that end, and as an additional and exceptional measure, COSLA and the Scottish Government have worked with partners across the care home sector to identify additional interim spaces in care homes in order to provide additional pathways for people to be discharged from hospital in a timely and safe fashion. In order to support health and social care partnerships to secure the extra provision, we are making available funding of £8 million so that beds can be purchased at 25 per cent above the national care home contract rate.

We will work closely with partners across the NHS, health and social care partnerships and local authorities to ensure appropriate use of funds and to ensure that we have evidence of the impact of that funding. That is a time-limited and in extremis measure that is required to help us with the current capacity issues that we face. The additional funding is intended to meet the increased costs of utilising those beds for a short time.

With partners working collaboratively, we have managed to identify that around 300 interim beds are available. They are in addition to the 600 interim beds that are already helping patients in the system.

That support is intended for use as an additional tool that health and social care partnerships can deploy to support them in the current situation and to allow additional flexibility in order to maximise capacity within our hospitals. We will work with partners to utilise every available bed. Such interim beds might not be a family's first or, indeed, second choice for their relative, but I hope that families agree that this is, in the current circumstances, about making the best possible choice for those who are in our care.

The measure will be in place for only a limited time to directly support our hospitals in dealing with pressures at the front door. It will enable some people to move from an acute setting to a more appropriate community one, in recognition of the risk of prolonged stays in hospital.

In addition, a ministerial advisory group has been established for a number of months to respond to winter pressures. The group, which meets weekly, brings together Cabinet members—including the Deputy First Minister, me and Shona Robison—with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and key stakeholders, including Scottish Care, to advise on pressures in the system and to consider possible actions to mitigate them.

This week, further guidance has been issued to health boards to make it absolutely clear that they can and should take steps to protect critical and life-saving care, if that is judged to be necessary. Boards can, of course, ask the Government for advice as and when it is required.

We believe that local health boards are best placed to judge what reasonable measures should be taken in each board area. Those measures could include opening or procuring additional capacity; moving staff to areas of pressure; increased engagement with the third sector; and, potentially, delivering a different model of care for a short period.

In my role as health secretary, I retain the emergency powers and ability to direct that are set out in the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978. I am well aware that more severe measures, such as a blanket pause on elective procedures or on key diagnostic tests, are not without impact on the health service and on patients, so it is important at this time that we ensure that NHS boards have the ability to respond flexibly to local circumstances and to deploy local solutions. Advice has recently been issued to local leaders that provides clear guidance on the expectations for assessment, discharge practice and care home oversight arrangements.

Record numbers of patients are also being delayed under the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000. Although such patients are clinically ready for discharge, they cannot legally be discharged until a court-appointed guardian is in place. Officials have been working with the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service and the Law Society of Scotland to investigate where improvements can be made to ensure that people are discharged in a timely manner. I have also met the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland and the Equality and Human Rights Commission this winter to discuss matters that affect adults with incapacity.

Some of the measures that I have just announced are intended to help in the short term with the immediate pressures that we face, but we are also putting in place the necessary long-term steps to address social care challenges that we face. We have invested significant additional funding to support social care. In the current

financial year, that includes £124 million to enhance care-at-home capacity, £200 million to increase the hourly rate of pay to £10.50, £20 million to support interim care arrangements, and £40 million to enhance multidisciplinary teams. A further £3.6 million has been made available in the 2022-23 budget to support further development of hospital at home services across Scotland.

It is clear that our accident and emergency services are being impacted severely by winter pressures—of course, that situation is not unique to Scotland. Scotland's A and E services continue to outperform those in other parts of the UK, and have done for the past seven years, but that is cold comfort for those who are waiting far too long for treatment.

Scotland already has record numbers of NHS staff, and we are recruiting more staff as part of our winter plan. However, it is clear that far too many people are waiting far too long for care—whether that is for an ambulance response or for treatment when they attend our A and E departments. We have taken action to improve A and E waits, including plans to recruit 1,000 new NHS staff and to roll out the £50 million urgent and unscheduled care collaborative to help to drive down such waits. Measures include initiatives such as providing the hospital at home service, ensuring that people are directed to the most appropriate urgent care settings and scheduling urgent appointments to avoid long waits in A and E. We have also increased the amount of virtual capacity—for hospital-level care that is provided at home—to the capacity of a large teaching hospital.

We will also bolster workforce capacity within NHS 24. NHS 24 is an incredibly effective service, and because of the expert advice that it offers, the overwhelming majority of those who call NHS 24 do not need onward transfer to already busy A and E departments. This winter, NHS 24 is taking forward the planned recruitment of around 200 new starts before the end of March. As part of that recruitment, the board appointed over 40 whole-time equivalent call operators, call handlers and clinical supervisors in the run-up to Christmas. Although call wait times for NHS 24 were often longer than usual over the festive period, the vast majority of calls that were received were dealt with through the initial contact.

Despite the pressures that I have outlined, we are seeing progress being made in some key areas across the system. For example, excluding NHS Lothian, the latest figures show that, despite continuing pressures, almost 19,500 operations were performed in November 2022. That is almost 21 per cent higher than the number in November 2021, when more than 16,000 operations took place. It also marks the highest proportion—over 91 per cent—of planned operations to have been

performed since the start of the pandemic. That is progress in relation to our elective care.

We are offering more support outside hospital settings to assist people who seek help with common winter illnesses. NHS Inform has issued self-help guides to let everybody know when to stay at home and when to seek more care. General practitioners and pharmacies can be also be contacted as a first port of call for non-critical, non-emergency care. I would like to add, as a reminder to all, that people who have symptoms of respiratory infection should try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people. If people need to leave home, we strongly recommend that they wear a face covering.

I understand that the NHS is built on the people who work in it, who have had to work through incredibly challenging circumstances for years. The pressure of almost three years of the pandemic has been relentless. I will always be available to talk to our committed workforce, who provide incredible care to the people of Scotland day in, day out.

I am grateful to the members of Unison, Unite and other trade unions who have accepted the Government's record pay offer for NHS staff. In fact, the majority of trade unions that are on the Scottish Terms and Conditions Committee—the agenda for change pay negotiating committee—have accepted our pay deal. Although I am naturally disappointed that we have not got agreement from every trade union, I am also grateful for the positive engagement that has taken place with the GMB, the Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Nursing. I will continue to pursue meaningful dialogue with all trade unions to try to avert industrial action. We sincerely hope that the additional pressure of industrial action can be avoided at this very challenging time for the health service. For my part, I remain absolutely committed to dialogue and to positively engaging with our trade unions.

As I have outlined, unprecedented challenges continue to have a real impact on the NHS and on people across the country. Although we face an extremely difficult period ahead, I remain confident that, with the combined efforts of our incredible workforce and the determined will of this Government, those challenges will be met—and not only met, but overcome.

Presiding Officer, let me end where I started, by thanking our outstanding health and social care staff for their herculean efforts during these extremely challenging times. We will continue to honour them, not just with warm words but through our deeds, too. I thank you for giving me the ability and time to make this statement. Of course, I am happy to take questions from across the chamber.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow 40 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. I would be grateful if members who wish to ask a question were to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): Under the cabinet secretary's watch, the Scottish NHS is on its knees. A and E waiting times, cancer waiting times and delayed discharge are all at their worst-ever levels, with no improvement in sight.

While record numbers of patients were waiting more than 12 hours in A and E, where was the health secretary? We heard nothing from Humza Yousaf over the festive period, only for this hastily cobbled-together statement to be given today before another divisive debate on independence—which is timetabled to last longer than this statement on healthcare.

This is a national emergency. People are dying unnecessarily. Our heroic NHS staff are overwhelmed and burning out. Addressing the crisis in our NHS should be a priority for the Parliament, because it is a priority for the people of Scotland, and they will be appalled today.

I simply cannot fathom why the cabinet secretary did not plan for, in his words, the worst-ever winter that our NHS has faced. Cases of Covid, flu and the cold and the number of accidents are all increasing. That was predictable. For months, we have been calling on Humza Yousaf to rethink his failing NHS recovery plan. Just last month, we published a recovery plan of our own, but our warnings fell on deaf ears, and the Scottish people are now paying the price for the complete lack of preparation. The British Medical Association has said that the Scottish Government has run out of ideas.

Over the festive period, I was out seeing patients in different parts of the country. The problems are similar everywhere. Primary care, secondary care and hospitals are overwhelmed. Patients are scared of going to A and E departments. We need to see improvements, and we need to see them urgently.

In relation to the changes that were announced yesterday, when can we expect to see meaningful change in our NHS, such as improvements in A and E waiting times, delayed discharge numbers and cancer treatment waiting times? Can the cabinet secretary confirm the timescales in which he expects to see significant improvements?

Humza Yousaf: I thank the member for his questions. These issues are being faced by every health service across the UK. Dr Sandesh Gulhane asked where I was over the festive period. I was busy talking to our trade union

colleagues. If his party had done the same, it might not have had nurses and ambulance drivers walking out on strike.

On planning, I noticed that the Conservatives published their winter plan in mid-December. That was not particularly helpful or useful, because the winter planning that we undertook took place after the previous winter had passed. When it comes to planning, if Dr Sandesh Gulhane was the oracle that he claims to be and could have predicted every pressure that the NHS is facing, he might have wanted to tell his colleagues down south, because these pressures are being faced not only by every health service in the UK but by many health services across the world.

What are we doing about those pressures? We have taken a number of actions. As well as the actions that I have announced today, I have already announced the recruitment of additional staff. In fact, we recruited staff last winter with recurring funding in order to help with pressures this winter. We have also provided additional funding for the Scottish Ambulance Service. In 2021-22, the service recruited record numbers of ambulance staff. I have already given details of how our winter plan, which is backed by £600 million of funding, is already helping in relation to social care.

Therefore, we have taken action. However, notwithstanding that, I have always been up front and honest in publicly stating that, even with those mitigations in place, this will be the most difficult winter that our NHS has ever faced.

In answer to the final question that Sandesh Gulhane asked, I simply say that I expect to see improvements in the very short term as a result of the action that we are taking. However, equally, let me be up front and honest by saying that, as schools return and as people return to work and mingle, it is possible that there could be a slight increase in the spread of viral infections, so we expect the first few weeks of January to be extremely challenging.

There will continue to be challenges, but, as a result of the action that I have announced in relation to interim care beds and additional staffing for NHS 24, I hope that there will be some improvements in those pressures in the short term.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The health secretary is keen to tell us that the NHS is under unprecedented pressure this winter, and he cites Covid, flu and Strep A. Let me join him in thanking all NHS staff for everything that they are doing, but they would tell us that this crisis is not unprecedented; it was predicted by clinicians. In fact, fewer patients are being seen in A and E

departments now than were being seen before the pandemic.

What is unprecedented is that the health secretary was warned about the crisis by clinicians for well over a year but failed to listen and to act on solutions. What is unprecedented is that the Government failed to end delayed discharge, which it promised to do in 2015. Eight years on, it is at record high levels.

Dr Iain Kennedy of the BMA is clear that the current crisis at the front door of A and E is because the back door, to social care, has not been fixed. What is unprecedented is that, because the Government has presided over inadequate workforce planning for the past 15 years, we now have 6,400 nursing vacancies and, in some areas, 14 per cent of consultant posts lie empty.

I therefore want to ask the health secretary about the 1,000 additional staff. How many of them are actually in post and where are they deployed? I also want to ask about the 300 extra beds. I am sure that they will help, but, when the latest data reveals a record high of more than 1,900 people stuck in hospitals, what impact will the measure have?

Will the cabinet secretary give a commitment to removing non-residential care charges and supporting home and family carers? That would directly contribute to helping to end delayed discharge.

Finally, why is the First Minister not here, giving the statement, as she did yesterday? Why has she instead sent along her spare?

Humza Yousaf: I notice that Jackie Baillie is here, asking the questions, rather than Anas Sarwar, the leader of the Scottish Labour Party. I will not personally insult Jackie Baillie, because, at a time of national emergency, the people rightly expect their political leaders to rise above their petty political differences and work together in the national interest.

Let me respond—[*Interruption.*] Jackie Baillie and her colleagues can shout from a sedentary position, but it is important that I answer their questions. On delayed discharge, as I said to Sandesh Gulhane, I expect there to be improvement once we begin to move people from acute sites into the interim beds, which we expect to happen in the short term. Hopefully, as the levels of flu and Covid begin to abate and reduce, we will begin to see an improvement in our health service and in the performance indicators that Jackie Baillie referenced.

We have a very proud record—I am proud of it—on staffing in the NHS over the past 15 years. Staffing in the NHS is at record levels. However,

Jackie Baillie is right to mention the high levels of vacancies, which we are keen to fill. That is why, last year, I announced additional funding to recruit nurses from overseas. Last year, we committed to 200 nurses—

Jackie Baillie: How many have you recruited?

Humza Yousaf: I hear Jackie Baillie shouting from a sedentary position—I was literally answering her question as she was talking.

We promised to recruit 200 nurses last winter, and we exceeded that. That funding is recurring. For this winter, we have said that, up to April, we will recruit an additional 750 nurses. I believe that there have been 126 firm offers and that 455 are in the pipeline—that is what boards expect to fulfil. That is all the way up to April. I will give a further update as we get towards the end of this financial year, and I will continue to push boards to go further in their recruitment, where possible.

On Jackie Baillie's suggestion about non-residential charges, we have a promise—a programme for government commitment—to abolish non-residential charges. I will continue to work in my portfolio to do that at the earliest possible opportunity.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): My question to the cabinet secretary relates to the number of people who are suffering from flu and Covid, not just in our hospitals but in our communities. What action can the Government take to increase the take-up of the Covid booster and flu vaccines?

Humza Yousaf: Gillian Martin is absolutely right to focus on vaccination. We know that Covid vaccination, in particular, is a complete game changer and that the flu vaccine can be effective as well. In Scotland, we have decided to co-administer the Covid and flu vaccines. The uptake has been positive, but I encourage all those who are eligible and who have not come forward to do so. The statistics and data that we have show that uptake levels among health and social care workers are not as high as I would like them to be. I ask front-line health and social care workers who have not had the Covid or flu vaccine please to come forward, because that will help to protect them and, I hope, those to whom they give such exceptional care.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I put on the record our thanks to the UK Government for the Covid vaccination programme.

Over the Christmas break, I was inundated with correspondence about the crisis in our Scottish NHS. The latest statistics seem to reflect a situation that is now spiralling out of control. Last week, just two in five patients were seen within four hours at the Royal infirmary of Edinburgh,

despite weekly attendance being lower than it was in the same week in 2019, before the pandemic.

Let me put the current situation in the words of Dr David Caesar, a senior emergency medicine consultant at the Royal infirmary. Dr Caesar said that

“Dignity feels like a distant luxury”

and that the fatigue among clinicians is “bone deep”, with staff dejected and in total despair. In his answer, perhaps the cabinet secretary could speak to Dr Caesar, not to me. What is the one practical thing that the cabinet secretary will do today that will help Dr Caesar and his colleagues tomorrow?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Sue Webber for the question. I know Dr Dave Caesar—he used to be one of my deputy chief medical officers in the Government, and I am grateful for the work that he has done. I read his piece, which I think was in *The Times*. I read the public comments that he made.

Before I answer Sue Webber's question directly, I confirm that she is right and that attendances were lower. However, what that masks, as any clinician on the front line will tell you, is the fact that people are presenting with higher acuity: they are presenting sicker, and therefore their length of stay is longer. That is the challenge that we are currently facing, as well as the exit block—the lack of capacity within already very busy hospital sites.

What can we do to help the likes of Dr Dave Caesar and every other health and social care worker who is doing an exceptional job? We can reduce that workload pressure, which is why there is the additional funding for the 300 interim beds that we have identified and will look to utilise as quickly as possible. We hope that that will begin to reduce that workload pressure. We can continue to make sure that Dr David Caesar and NHS staff are properly rewarded. That is why we put forward a record pay rise for agenda for change staff. We will do what we can to retain our doctors and other staff, making sure that they are appropriately rewarded and remunerated.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government's resilience room has been reconvened, given the level of pressure that our NHS and care services are facing. I am pleased that I played a wee part in suggesting that.

The First Minister's briefing yesterday, just like the briefings during Covid, was incredibly useful and helpful. Will the Scottish Government continue to keep Parliament and the public regularly updated on the work that is being undertaken to help to address the pressures on our health and care services?

Humza Yousaf: Yes, I am happy to. I am happy to do media briefings. The First Minister and I will reflect on whether to do another media briefing, and, of course, I am happy at any point to come to the chamber to answer questions on this issue and keep Parliament updated.

It is important that we have the ability to speak directly to the public. That public health messaging is incredibly important. The member may have seen that, throughout the festive period, I was reiterating some of that health messaging, as was the First Minister and the likes of the national clinical director, Jason Leitch. All of us have a role to play in communicating with not just our constituents but the public more widely.

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): In relation to the additional beds that have been announced, unpaid carers have raised concerns about the potential for loved ones to be “parked”—their word—in care homes, perhaps against their wishes, as they wait for care assessments. There are serious concerns for people’s wellbeing. How will the cabinet secretary increase capacity to ensure that people are appropriately assessed and not abandoned in a setting that may be inappropriate and unwelcomed, particularly with reports this week that social workers in Scotland missed more than 30,000 work days due to mental ill health? Does he accept that it all comes back to retaining and recruiting more social care staff by valuing them and ensuring that they are offered more than this Government’s insulting rise of 40p?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Paul O’Kane for the important questions that he asked. I may disagree with some of the characterisation of the situation—I will come to that in a second—but they are incredibly important questions.

Those are difficult conversations to have, but, of course, our clinicians, who have those conversations day in and day out, do so compassionately, but also collaboratively with families. However, I was being up front in my statement that an interim placement may not be a family’s first or second choice.

Equally, when someone is clinically safe to be discharged, remaining in a hospital that might be at 95 per cent, 99 per cent or above 100 per cent capacity cannot be good for the individual who is involved, let alone for the hospital. Clinicians always try to work with families to ensure that the most suitable care placement is available for them. It might be the case for some of those placements that people are placed, the assessment takes place in the interim care placement and they are either moved on to a permanent care home place or get the package of care that they require for home. When someone is clinically safe to be discharged, being in hospital is not the best choice for them. We know that prolonged stays in hospital

for people who are clinically safe for discharge is not good for those patients.

Paul O’Kane and I rehearsed the social care staff question at committee this morning. Our 2023-24 budget has an uplift to £10.90 per hour. That is the third pay rise in the time that I have been Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care—from 2020-21—and it represents an increase of more than £2,000 a year for someone who is on a full-time wage. I say to Paul O’Kane—I will correct this if I am wrong—that £10.90, or the real living wage, is the same wage that is being offered by Labour in Wales, where it is in charge of the health service.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): A recent report by the Nuffield Trust has warned that Britain’s departure from the European Union has worsened recruitment shortages, made accessing essential medicines more difficult and further exacerbated health inequalities. Does the cabinet secretary share my concerns that the economic hit of a hard Tory Brexit is fuelling the severe challenges that the NHS in Scotland is facing?

Humza Yousaf: There is just no doubt about it. If you talk to any social care provider, they will tell you the damage that Brexit has caused. Social care has been hit by a number of difficult challenges over the years; a hard Tory Brexit is certainly one of them, and the pandemic is another. The most recent concern of social care providers, whether they are care home providers or care at home providers, is the high cost of inflation, which is a direct result of the UK Government’s mismanagement of the economy. That has led to care home energy costs being exceptionally high, and high fuel costs are a problem for care at home providers as well.

I am in constant dialogue with the care sector in Scotland, and I have regular conversations with other health ministers across the four nations. I will continue to implore the UK Government to do what it can in relation to migration, because there is more that can be done in relation to overseas recruitment to help our social care and NHS staff, and to see what more it can do in relation to mitigation of high energy and inflation costs.

The Presiding Officer: There is much interest in this item of business, so I would be grateful for concise questions and responses.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): It is now more than a year since I first asked the cabinet secretary to instruct an urgent Government inquiry into avoidable deaths caused by the crisis in emergency care. We now understand the quantum of that, with the Royal College of Emergency Medicine telling us over the Christmas period that, as a result of the crisis in

emergency care, as many as 40 people a week might be dying who did not need to die. I ask the cabinet secretary again whether he will now instruct an urgent Government inquiry into avoidable deaths.

Humza Yousaf: I am not disputing—I do not think that any of us would—the Royal College of Emergency Medicine’s underlying premise that, if patients are waiting excessively long periods for care, they will come to harm. However, each death would have to be individually examined to understand the true scale of that. Although I will not instruct a public inquiry into every single death that might have happened as a result of long waits, I will take time to consider what Alex Cole-Hamilton has said, so that we can understand the true picture of those who have come to harm due to excessively long waits.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary confirm that all financial resources are allocated in the current year, which means that, in order to put any more resources into part of the NHS or the NHS as a whole, there would have to be a balancing cut elsewhere?

Humza Yousaf: Yes. I do not know whether I made this clear in my statement, but the £8 million that we are putting towards the 300 interim care beds is coming from the health and social care portfolio. Every penny is allocated—it is not additional finance coming from central finance—so we have to find the money from the health and social care budget, which, as John Mason and other members know, is extremely challenging, given the current financial circumstances.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Delayed discharge predates the pandemic, severe workforce pressures predate the pandemic and long A and E waits predate the pandemic. The minister has been being warned about those problems for years and he has chosen to ignore those warnings. Now that the First Minister is doing his job, should he not do the decent thing and resign?

Humza Yousaf: Again, I will not rise to pathetic and petty personal attacks. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Thank you.

Humza Yousaf: I ask Craig Hoy: is that it? When our country is facing a national emergency and the NHS is facing one of the biggest challenges that it has ever faced during its 74-year existence, is the best that Craig Hoy can come up with a quip that he practised in the mirror before coming down to the chamber? The Government is focused, and I am focused, on taking action, whether that be through the recruitment of additional staff, the recruitment of additional ambulance staff, or through putting in £600 million to help the NHS to cope with the winter pressures.

As I say, I will allow Craig Hoy to do his flimsy and pathetic party politicking while the Government’s relentless focus will be on supporting the NHS, the people who receive care, and the wonderful workforce that give that exceptional care.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): In the past few weeks, my inbox—like that of any other member—has been full of messages from constituents concerned about long waiting times at A and E, primarily at Monklands hospital in my area, with some reporting waits of up to 10 hours. I have also been contacted by many local NHS staff who have been working around the clock, and I offer them my heartfelt thanks.

I welcome today’s statement from the cabinet secretary. In light of the circumstances and the pressures faced by Monklands A and E, how can the additional support that he has outlined help NHS Lanarkshire avoid those pressures?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Fulton MacGregor for his very important question. He is right to say that NHS Lanarkshire is one of the health boards that is facing that pressure most acutely, and as he might imagine, I have been to many sites in Lanarkshire and have spoken to the new chief executive, who has been in place since December, about those pressures. I am personally interacting quite closely with NHS Lanarkshire.

During my most recent visit to NHS Lanarkshire, I visited the A and E department at Wishaw, and it was clear to me that delayed discharge was causing some significant issues. I talked to one patient who had been waiting for far too long for treatment at A and E precisely because there was no bed available. A portion of the 300 interim beds will be in North and South Lanarkshire.

I commend Lanarkshire for its very good collaborative pan-Lanarkshire way of working. When I speak to the chief officers and chief executives of North and South Lanarkshire Councils, and the health boards, it is clear that good collaborative work is being done on the ground, and I encourage Lanarkshire to continue with that.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): We should make no mistake: this is a humanitarian emergency. It is costing lives and damaging the wellbeing of NHS and social care workers. NHS Lanarkshire has just been mentioned. That is the crisis within the crisis. The code black nightmare that began in 2021 continues today in 2023, so constituents in Lanarkshire want to know when that will end.

I have two short questions for now, one of which is again about Lanarkshire. We need more doctors for out of hours and across primary care. Can the cabinet secretary update me on that?

As well as the immediate action that we need to take, we need long-term solutions, so will he agree, with the BMA and others, to facilitate a national conversation on the future and survival of the NHS?

Humza Yousaf: Working out of hours is one of the key areas that the new chief executive of NHS Lanarkshire and I spoke about when we last met. The member might have seen from NHS Lanarkshire that GP practices in Lanarkshire will be open on additional days during the weekends. I welcome that.

There are standing directions to every single health board to work with their GP practices to see what more can be done around extending opening hours. I am grateful to the GPs and staff within their multidisciplinary teams who are working those additional hours, whether it be in the evenings or at weekends, to help practices to cope with some of the demand that they are facing.

Regarding Monica Lennon's second question, I gave an indication during media interviews at the weekend that I am open to the idea of a national conversation with the public about the health service. I think that Monica Lennon and most—if not all—members of this Parliament would agree that that conversation must be grounded in the founding principles of the NHS. The idea of a national conversation is a good one: let us ensure that we do it in such a way and at such a time that it does not add pressure and work to a system that is already facing significant pressure. I am happy to keep Monica Lennon updated about those conversations.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): What actions are being taken to ensure that health boards retain the ability to respond to local circumstances to alleviate some of the unique pressures that they currently face?

Humza Yousaf: I hope that I gave an indication of that in my statement. There have been calls for the Government to declare a national major incident, but I think that it is right for health boards to retain decision-making at local level so that they can determine how best to flex their services in order to cope with the demand that they are facing. I will continue giving that flexibility to local health boards. At a national level I, the NHS chief executive, Caroline Lamb, and the chief operating officer, John Burns, will always remain close to our NHS boards to offer advice and support, where that is appropriate.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): The cabinet secretary will be aware of my keen interest in staff welfare. A lack of time away from wards is cited as the biggest barrier to staff accessing breaks. If they are to be able to have those breaks, we need more staff, and Brexit has

undoubtedly affected staffing. I welcome everything that the cabinet secretary has said so far about recruitment. Further to his answer to Rona Mackay's question, what conversations has the cabinet secretary had with the Home Office and UK Government ministers about fast-track visas for those coming to work in the Scottish NHS? If those conversations have not yet taken place, will he ask for a meeting as a matter of urgency?

Humza Yousaf: I have previously raised that subject with the UK Government. In fairness, that subject has been raised not only by me but by the Welsh health secretary, too. I know that she is very supportive of continuing those discussions to try to get the UK Government to see sense about the current prohibitive and restrictive immigration rules. I genuinely do not understand those. I know that many NHS trusts in England face the same challenges that we do, in social care as well as in the NHS. Gillian Mackay makes a good suggestion. I will ask for the issue of immigration, and immigration rules in particular, to be back on the agenda at the next four nations meeting.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Given the additional pressure that Covid and seasonal flu are responsible for in both the primary and acute care sectors, can the cabinet secretary confirm whether medical opinion indicates that it would be a valuable step to extend eligibility for the vaccination booster programme—which is currently for adults aged 50 years and over—to include adults who are under 50?

Humza Yousaf: Kaukab Stewart asks a good question. Eligibility for the Covid vaccination booster programme or for any future vaccination programme is always informed by advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. We have not previously departed in any significant way from JCVI advice. We will continue our discussions with the JCVI, but it is important to take its informed and expert advice and then to come to a decision based on circumstances at the time.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): One in 10 patients who arrived at hospitals by ambulance in the final week of December waited for more than three hours to be offloaded into A and E departments. I have a constituent who called 999 and waited for 12 and half hours for an ambulance crew to arrive. What steps is the cabinet secretary taking to ensure that ambulances can be back on the road as soon as possible? What steps is he taking to ensure that call handlers have the training that they need and are able to prioritise calls as they come in?

Humza Yousaf: Sharon Dowey asks an important question. She is right to say that ambulance turnaround times at far too many acute

sites have been far too long. I think that she has a particular interest in the Ayr and Crosshouse hospitals. At those two sites in particular, turnaround times have been far too long.

We are working closely with Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board to try to improve the situation, as she would expect us to do. However, she is well aware that the entire system is connected. That is why I said in my statement that we are taking a whole-system approach.

If we can create some capacity by safely discharging 300 people in the system who it is clinically safe to discharge and get them out of busy acute sites, that will help with the flow in our hospitals and allow ambulances to convey patients to the acute sites much more quickly and get back out on to the road. That shortens the response times.

I agree that the type of response times that Ms Dowey referred to are not the standard of care that we expect. The measures that I announced today will directly help with those turnaround times. We are also working with the sites and health boards, such as NHS Ayrshire and Arran, where turnaround times are far too high to see whether other conveyancing areas can be created. We accept that there is limited capacity in acute sites, but we are examining whether any additional space can be found to convey patients and allow ambulances to turn around quickly and get back out on to the road.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I was contacted by a constituent regarding a recent call to NHS 24 that went unanswered and was cut off after a two-hour wait. I am sure that the cabinet secretary agrees that that should not happen. In such circumstances, patients are likely to attend A and E, which might not always be required and puts additional pressures on the service.

As a result of recent increased demand on NHS 24, what provisions are being put in place for future surge capacity to adequately handle calls to ensure that people can make use of the service instead of accessing other parts of the NHS, including hospitals?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Bob Doris for an important question. I went to meet and speak to staff at NHS 24 on Christmas eve, so I was there at one of the moments when pressure was at its highest. In fact, if memory serves me right, I went at 10 o'clock in the morning and 900 people were already waiting for their calls to be answered.

I hope that Bob Doris understands and appreciates—I think that he does—the exceptional pressure over the festive period. I referred to the almost 100,000 calls that NHS 24 received over the two four-day weekends in the holiday period.

That is a demonstration of the high level of demand.

NHS 24 expected high levels of demand and increased its staff between October and December but, even with those additional staff in place, there were still challenges for some people in getting through. That is why I referred to the 200 additional staff at NHS 24. That recruitment will help with call-answering times.

I also say to Bob Doris and anybody who is listening that the NHS 24 app is available. It is a minimal viable product. It has self-help guides on it and information about, for example, the local general practice and local pharmacy. We will keep building on that app so that it becomes a full digital offer in the weeks, months and years to come. I also point people towards NHS Inform.

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): Constituents in Lothian region have struggled to get through to a call handler on NHS 24, which is causing distress and anxiety to those who are ill and do not know where to turn. As a result, they might be more likely to attend A and E unnecessarily to get medical attention, thereby increasing pressure on NHS services that are already at breaking point this winter.

Will the cabinet secretary advise what support will be given to constituents who are desperately trying to get help from NHS 24 before the recruitment of new starts is completed by March? More than 100 trained staff are being let go from the Covid national contact centre. Could those workers be reassigned to assist?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Foyso Choudhury for his question and suggestion. As we have begun to reduce the numbers working in the national contact centre, we have looked to deploy as many as we can back into the health service and some into social care.

The recruitment of the 200 additional staff at NHS 24 that I mentioned began in October to help with the festive period. We will continue to recruit. That will help Mr Choudhury's constituents who are struggling to get through to NHS 24. I have seen the latest data, which show a reduction in the amount of time that people are waiting for their calls to be answered. I hope that that is a positive sign of things to come.

As well as NHS 24, we have the app that I have mentioned; NHS Inform, which has a symptom checker that has been checked millions of times over the past few months; the pharmacy first service; and GPs. There are many avenues that someone can go to before going to A and E, and I would encourage everybody to make sure that they get the right care in the right place at the right time.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Bob Doris and Foysol Choudhury have raised the really important issue of the time that it takes people to get through to someone on NHS 24. I have had examples of people waiting two hours or more to get an answer on the phone, which leads to additional problems.

Of course, people still have other problems in trying to access GP services, for exactly the same reasons. Despite making call after call, day after day, to get an appointment, they are unable to do so, which builds up problems for the future. What specific action will the Government take to increase the availability of GP appointments, in order to avoid unwarranted and unnecessary presentations at A and E?

Humza Yousaf: That is a really important question. Murdo Fraser raises an important issue. It is worth saying—I think that Murdo Fraser would agree with this—that our GPs and GP staff are doing an incredible job in really difficult circumstances, and the workload pressure that is on them is unprecedented.

At the same time, I recognise the situation that Murdo Fraser articulates. Many members across the chamber, from all the political parties that are represented, have written to me over the past weeks and months to tell me that they have constituents who have struggled to get GP appointments. That is why I announced several measures, the first of which is funding for telephony services. Where GP practices can improve their telephony services to help with access issues, we have provided some funding.

I have also written to every GP practice to say that my expectation is that every GP practice should offer pre-bookable appointments, because we still have the situation in far too many GP practices whereby people have to phone up at 8 in the morning. They might not get through—they might be 25th in the queue and then hang up. As a result, people end up at A and E, as Murdo Fraser said. Pre-bookable appointments could help with that.

The last thing that I will say on the issue is that I have instructed a GP access group to be set up, which will have on it not just GPs, but a patient representative, to unblock any of the GP access issues that currently exist. I am in regular dialogue with the British Medical Association—I suspect that Murdo Fraser will know Dr Andrew Buist fairly well—about what more we can do to work together collaboratively to improve access to GP practices.

I will end my answer to the question where I started, by saying that I understand just how hard our GPs and GP practice staff are working under unprecedented pressure.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is from Paul McLennan.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on the measures—

The Presiding Officer: Sorry, Mr McLennan. I am taking a point of order from Stephen Kerr.

Stephen Kerr: Presiding Officer, I am mindful of the fact that you allocated 40 minutes for questions. We are now at 39 minutes, and I am sure that a number of colleagues still want to ask questions, including Conservative members. Would you be minded, on the precedent of last year's statement on services at Dr Gray's hospital, under rule 8.14.3 of standing orders, to extend business until all colleagues who have issues to raise with the cabinet secretary have had the opportunity to do so?

The Presiding Officer: Although I am not minded to accept such a motion, I am determined that members who have pressed their request-to-speak buttons will have their questions taken.

Paul McLennan: Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on the progress that has been made on the measures that were previously put in place to recruit additional staff from outwith Scotland?

Humza Yousaf: Before I answer that question, I say that I am happy to stay in the chamber for as long as necessary to answer these important questions.

On recruitment from outwith Scotland, I have referenced in some of my answers the efforts on international recruitment. We made efforts to recruit nurses from overseas last winter and provided recurring funding to help this winter. We exceeded our target of 200 nurses and have provided further funding. As the member probably knows, in October I announced around £8 million to support the recruitment of up to 750 nurses, midwives and allied health professionals. As I referenced in my answer to Jackie Baillie, around 126 firm offers have been accepted, and we expect there to be many more in the pipeline as we move towards April.

We are also continuing to encourage GPs from across the rest of the UK, in particular, to see Scotland as a destination for them. Scotland—particularly in the case of our remote, rural and island communities—is a very attractive place to work. We have a proactive campaign under way to see if we can attract GPs from the rest of the UK to work here.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): At quarter past 3, I received a text from my GP surgery, saying that it will be providing only emergency appointments. That is similar to the texts that I have been receiving since 13 June when I have tried to access my GP surgery. We are in a real crisis.

I have said many times in this place that the Scottish Government is taking an unsustainable trajectory in healthcare in Scotland and is managing the decline of our health service. Covid has just accelerated that decline.

Is it not about time that the long-term sustainability of the Scottish national health service was mapped out and we looked at the preventative health agenda and tackled Scotland's poor health record? We are still the unhealthiest nation in Europe. Should we not be looking to prevent the need to seek healthcare in the first place or, at the very least, treating patients at an earlier stage, before they become acute and require more intensive care? Surely that is a significant way to reduce the pressure on our health service.

Humza Yousaf: I agree with everything that Brian Whittle said in relation to the importance of the preventative agenda. I spoke at length about that at this morning's meeting of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. Our 2023-24 budget continues that focus and our approach of putting investment and funding towards the preventative agenda.

Mr Whittle is right that there can be a temptation—which we will, of course, avoid—when dealing with an unprecedented emergency situation, to lose focus on the preventative agenda. We will not do that. We will continue to focus on smoking cessation, our work on alcohol and drugs treatment, and our work in relation to obesity and healthy and active lifestyles. I know that the latter is very important to Mr Whittle, and I give him a firm commitment that we will continue our focus on the preventative agenda, while also dealing with the unprecedented pressures that we face.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be aware that allied health professionals have unique skills that help with discharge from hospital. They are essential in making that happen and returning people home safely, which undoubtedly helps with pressures on acute beds. AHP services are currently under pressure, with vacancies across the country. What discussions has the Government had to ensure that the increase in bed capacity also gives patients access to that essential group of staff?

Humza Yousaf: I could not agree more with Carol Mochan about the importance of AHPs. A

multidisciplinary approach needs to be taken to provide people with holistic healthcare. That is why we have recruited more than 3,220 members of those multidisciplinary teams, many of whom are working in general practice up and down the country. We are investing in AHPs in our hospitals, for example in our frailty teams, to help to reduce the length of time before people—particularly elderly people who have had a fall—come into hospital. We will continue to work with all the relevant bodies in relation to AHPs, and I place on record my thanks for the incredible work that they do, and the holistic care that they provide up and down the country.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Why did Scottish health boards have to wait for days for this slothful Scottish National Party Government to send a letter to allow them to move staff around to deal with the crisis when, on Friday, Humza Yousaf knew that Borders general hospital was cancelling routine operations for my constituents? I would like to know from the health secretary: why the delay?

Humza Yousaf: Rachael Hamilton's question betrays her ignorance of the health service and how the health service works. There has never been a blockage on local health boards being able to take local decisions. In fact, she has just given the example of how a local health board took a decision to meet local demand. That was happening up and down the country long before I was health secretary—it has happened for many years.

It is a founding principle of our national health service that local health boards have the ability to locally flex the care that they provide. What I did in my letter was simply ensure that there was further guidance, particularly in emergency-type situations, should health boards require it. As Rachael Hamilton referenced in her question, that is already being done. I am very grateful to local health boards for taking really difficult decisions in a time of great emergency.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): The villages and communities of Port William and Whithorn in Wigtonshire have been without adequate GP coverage for many months. With the closest A and E department being an hour's drive away and there currently being four-hour waits on the NHS 24 helpline, there is massive pressure on the community pharmacy, which is going above and beyond to look after the health concerns of local people. The pharmacist in Whithorn is looking at an average of 83 pharmacy first visits per week, of which 28 come under the pharmacy first plus service. That is over and above the normal day job. Over the past few weeks, the position has been dramatically worse.

That number of visits is far more than an average pharmacy would see in the course of a month.

This is undeniably a crisis that is putting people's lives at risk. Will the cabinet secretary consider intervening and, as a matter of urgency, deploying GPs to those two rural communities, which are undeniably experiencing the greatest pressure, the greatest need and the greatest risk?

Humza Yousaf: I have regular conversations with our health boards, including NHS Dumfries and Galloway, NHS Borders and NHS Grampian, where we tend to see pretty significant pressures in relation to general practice and community pharmacies. I will continue having such conversations. On the back of Finlay Carson's question, I will also ask the chief medical officer and the chief pharmaceutical officer to see what more can be done, particularly on general practice cover in the areas that he has referenced.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I am interested in patients' rights with regard to the proposed interim beds in care homes. Can patients refuse to go to such beds if they want to go home but there is no care package to enable them to do so? Will they be parked for weeks in such beds, or is the cabinet secretary confident that he can move people on quickly? Can he guarantee that they will not be required to pay care home fees if they are self-funders?

Humza Yousaf: Those are important questions. The choice guidelines are still in place—we have not suspended them—and clinicians are mindful of them. As I mentioned in a previous answer, they have conversations on such issues day in, day out. We will not be forcing people out. As I said in my comments, which I hope that Willie Rennie will take in the spirit in which they were intended, an interim place might not be someone's first or even second choice. However, when it would be clinically safe for a patient to be clinically discharged, it would not be best for them to be in a hospital that is overoccupied and facing the pressures that currently exist if they can be in an interim place in a better environment. To answer Willie Rennie's question directly, the choice guidelines are still in place and have not been suspended.

I do not like the suggestion that anyone would be "parked"; that will not happen. I think that Willie Rennie will agree that whether a patient is in an interim or a permanent care home place, people who work in social care provide exceptional support, so such a patient's care needs will be attended to in the best way possible.

We are looking for that to be a short-term, interim measure, which should last for weeks and not months. We do not want people to be on interim placements for months and months; at

most, we want them to be there for weeks. Whether they are in Fife or any other part of the country, I have every confidence that chief officers, who are excellent at their jobs, will do a phenomenal job in getting people the permanent care packages that they require.

On Mr Rennie's final question, there will be no cost to individuals in relation to interim care placements.

Stephen Kerr: The cabinet secretary will be well aware of why I might be concerned about the situation in Forth Valley royal hospital, in the context of the measures that have been taken to reinforce the management and work practices at NHS Forth Valley.

With that in mind, and not having had sight of or a chance to read the cabinet secretary's statement in advance, I have listened carefully to find out whether it mentioned that something would happen, right here and now, that would meet the need that has been identified by the chair of BMA Scotland, who said:

"The NHS is haemorrhaging crucial staff—staff who we urgently need now more than ever before—and the government must step up to stop it. They can talk as much as they want about recruitment of staff, of investment in the system or of plans for improvement, but every single one will fall flat on its face unless there is a laser like focus on keeping the staff we have."

Will the cabinet secretary please underline the one thing that will happen now that will reinforce the retention of those very valuable NHS workers?

Humza Yousaf: I can give Mr Kerr more than one thing that will be done in just a second.

I am more than happy to have conversations with interested members about Forth Valley royal hospital. Mr Kerr will know that the improvement plan is in place and that I have committed to coming back to the Parliament with an update on how the plan is being enacted—I will do that.

One of the actions that we are taking that doctors have asked for is the reintroduction of a recycling of employer contributions—REC—scheme. We have given that ability to health boards and that scheme went live in many health boards up and down the country from the end of last year. That will help with retention and was a direct ask from the BMA. The other ask relates to pension issues. There has been some movement from the UK Government, but the BMA says that it is not enough, so we will continue to lobby the UK Government on that.

We will also pay our workforce. It is really important that we pay the members of our workforce adequately and fairly. We will continue to engage with them. The Scottish Government has put a record pay deal on offer for our agenda for change staff. We will continue to work with and

listen to our medical workforce, especially junior doctors, who, understandably, are feeling particularly aggrieved, given the pressure that they are under and the pay differentials that exist between them and senior medical staff. We will continue to engage on pay. Of course, that will help with retention, too.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the ministerial statement on NHS winter pressures.

Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a statement by Michael Matheson on Scotland's national energy strategy and just transition plan. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:52

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): I am pleased to inform Parliament that today, the Scottish Government is publishing its draft energy strategy and just transition plan. The draft strategy maps out the future of our energy sector and sets out an ambitious suite of actions for the Scottish Government, along with actions for industry, the regulator and the UK Government, to realise that bright future over the next decade.

We are at a pivotal point in Scotland's transition to net zero and the strategy charts a clear course for the transformation of the energy sector—one of Scotland's most important industries—to 2030 and beyond. That transition must be achieved in a way that delivers for the people of Scotland to enable us to embrace the opportunities of a green economy.

This is a time of unprecedented uncertainty in global and national energy markets. High energy prices are impacting people, communities and businesses across Scotland. Those uncertainties bring even more impetus to the need to deliver a decarbonised, affordable and secure energy system.

Scotland already has an enviable track-record in renewables. The success of the ScotWind leasing round—the world's largest floating offshore leasing round—and our long-standing commitment to onshore wind, are strong foundations on which to grow our renewables capabilities even further. Wind power is one of the lowest cost forms of electricity and the Scottish Government is clear that that is where we should focus to reduce costs in the long term and address our vulnerability to future energy cost crises.

The strategy builds on that success with three overarching objectives. The first is to significantly scale up renewable energy production, helping to secure a just transition away from fossil fuels. As part of the transition, overall energy demand will also reduce.

The second objective is to secure continued and increasing investment in the net zero energy economy. The delivery of the strategy will mean

more jobs, a growing supply chain, new manufacturing capabilities, new skills, new export opportunities and thriving communities.

The third objective is to deliver a fairer and more secure energy system that is no longer reliant on volatile international commodity markets and delivers lower costs for consumers. That requires stronger and more targeted action from the United Kingdom Government to reform the energy market in a way that is fair, and to create the right conditions for the investment needed in infrastructure to support the expansion of renewables.

The draft strategy sets out the significant opportunities for Scotland in transforming our energy system. Scotland already has 13.4GW of renewable electricity generation capacity. It is our ambition to deliver at least 20GW of additional low-cost renewable electricity capacity by 2030, which could generate the equivalent of around 50 per cent of Scotland's current total energy demand.

Scotland's rich renewables resource means that we can not only generate enough cheap green electricity to power Scotland's economy, but also generate a surplus and open up new economic opportunities for export. However, we must make those changes to our energy system in a way that is just. The transition must maximise economic benefits, ensure a fair distribution of opportunities and risks, and do so through a process that is inclusive. The oil and gas industry has played an important role in our economy and been part of our national identity for decades. However, our previous policy position of maximum economic recovery is no longer appropriate.

The strategy explores the challenges of moving away from oil and gas and the ability of low-carbon and net zero energy generation to not just replace, but build on the employment opportunities that people, particularly in the north-east, have come to rely on. In the strategy are the first results of the independent research that was announced in 2021 and scrutinised by a panel of experts on the future role of North Sea oil and gas in Scotland's energy system and economy.

That work shows that as an increasingly mature basin, production in the North Sea is expected to be around a third of 1999 levels by 2035 and less than 3 per cent of the 1999 peak by 2050. That projection takes account of the remaining potential development in the North Sea and is without any political decision to reduce consumption due to the climate emergency. That means that domestic production will effectively end within the next 20 years if we do nothing. The draft strategy is consulting on whether we should act faster than that.

Whatever people's position on the pace at which we move away from fossil fuels, a failure to act now to deliver a just transformation of our energy system would be to neglect our energy security and the future of our economy, and risk the kind of damage to industrial communities that we saw in the 1980s. However, if we seize the opportunity that is presented by the transition, the number of low-carbon jobs in the energy production sector is estimated to rise from 19,000 in 2019 to 77,000 by 2050, delivering a net gain in jobs across the energy production sector overall.

The strategy shows how we can build a positive route through the transition, boost employment in energy generation, and provide energy security. That is why today's publication is not just a draft energy strategy; it is also the first draft just transition plan.

We recognise that the transition must take account of different geographies, industries and infrastructure across the country. The draft energy strategy and just transition plan will be further developed through engagement with trade unions, businesses and communities. We are pleased to have supported the Scottish Trades Union Congress to ensure that workers have the opportunity to participate.

Our £500 million just transition fund is supporting Moray and the north-east to become centres of excellence for the transition. Projects such as the deployment of a new digital offshore energy skills passport to support the transition of skills and jobs across the rapidly changing industry are already under way. That work is led by OPITO. I hope that, as we move forward, the UK Government, which has, of course, benefited from oil and gas revenues for so long, will make a matching contribution.

The draft strategy sets out our key ambitions for renewables deployment and brings together clear policy positions and a route map to realise those ambitions. We have made proposals for key sectors. We propose increasing onshore wind from 8.78GW as of June 2022 to over 20GW by 2030. That would more than double our existing capacity. We propose increasing offshore wind from 1.9GW, as of June 2022, through a pipeline of 3.8GW already consented, to between 8GW and 11GW by 2030. The results of the ScotWind leasing round reflect market ambitions in excess of current planning assumptions.

The strategy consults on what a future ambition should be for solar, building on our current 411MW of capacity. Tidal stream also has potential. We are also consulting on an ambition for tidal and wave energy.

We recognise the huge potential of pumped hydro storage power to play a significant role in

our future energy system. The lack of an appropriate market mechanism from the UK Government is frustrating the realisation of that opportunity for significant economic investment, job creation, and gigawatts of clean energy. Coire Glas, for example, represents more than £1 billion of investment, with up to 1.5GW of capacity and 30 gigawatt hours of storage. The UK Government must take action to ensure that that potential is realised.

We will work with communities, energy companies and parts of the public sector, such as Forestry and Land Scotland and Scottish Water, that already generate renewables to expand community ownership. We also want to hear views on those ambitions from unions, wider industry and communities.

The draft strategy reaffirms the Government's position that we do not want or need new nuclear power. We are clear that the focus must be on developing flexible and renewable technologies rather than new nuclear fission plants, which are expensive and take decades to deliver. Although we do not have the power to influence offshore oil and gas exploration and extraction, we are seeking views on a more robust climate compatibility checkpoint, including for oil and gas fields that are already licensed but are not developed, and on a presumption of no new exploration in the North Sea.

The strategy reaffirms our commitment to, and the importance of, carbon capture, utilisation and storage to Scotland's energy transition. We continue to engage with the UK Government to encourage it to make swift decisions to support the Acorn project in the north-east, which is critical to not just Scotland's transition but that of the wider UK.

The Acorn project is connected to the development of a hydrogen economy, but it is clear that the most significant potential in hydrogen comes from the creation of green hydrogen from surplus renewable energy. As we set out in the "Hydrogen Action Plan", which was published in December, we will rapidly grow Scotland's hydrogen economy to deliver a renewable and low-carbon hydrogen production ambition of 5GW by 2030 and 25GW by 2045.

To put that in context, 5GW could produce energy that is equivalent to about a sixth of Scotland's total energy demand. Much of that hydrogen could be generated from our offshore wind sector, with the potential to create a new energy export industry for Scotland. In the coming months, we will develop sector export plans on renewables and hydrogen to set out how energy can continue to be a critical export growth sector as we transition to net zero.

The strategy sets out how we will meet the challenges of reducing demand so that Scotland's main energy-using sectors—heat in buildings, transport, industry and agriculture—use energy more efficiently and become largely decarbonised by 2030. That transition requires significant investment that goes beyond what a Government with limited borrowing powers can deliver. We will scale up activity to move from a funding policy model to a financing one. That will effectively leverage private sector investment and action to better amplify the impact of public investment.

The strategy gives investors certainty that Scotland is a place that supports renewable energy whole-heartedly. Our vision is that, by 2045, Scotland will have a climate-friendly energy system that delivers affordable, resilient and clean energy supplies for Scotland's households, communities and businesses.

The Scottish Government cannot deliver that vision alone. Industry must accelerate investment in key sectors and infrastructure and must continue to build capacity in the Scottish supply chain and the skills of the energy workforce. The UK Government must act on energy security, network investment and market reform, which are its responsibility, as is much of the groundwork that is required for a thriving hydrogen economy.

To deliver on the timescales that are set out, the UK Government must embrace the needs with pragmatism. A copy of the strategy has been forwarded to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and I will be inviting the UK Government to join us as part of an energy transition delivery group to deliver the plan.

Achieving the vision for Scotland will be a national endeavour and will require a collective effort at local and national levels across Government, industry and our communities. The consultation on the draft document opens today, and I look forward to hearing views from people across Scotland on critical aspects of our future net zero energy transition.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow about 30 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his much-delayed energy strategy. This represents a far from happy new year for the tens of thousands of workers who are engaged in the oil and gas sector. Those workers often feel as if they are an afterthought for the Government, and that impression will not improve after today.

While the cabinet secretary trumpets a rise in low-carbon jobs from 19,000 in 2019 to 77,000 in

2050—a target that is so far off that even the Scottish National Party might hit it—members of the Government have been parroting at least one made-up figure about wind power capacity for years, when they have known full well that it lacked any evidential basis. What evidence will the cabinet secretary provide to reassure workers that his numbers are correct this time? When will such jobs become available?

Let us not forget that a survey showed that just one in 10 oil and gas workers feel capable of switching to renewables. The statement's warm words said nothing about college places or retraining grants and incentives and—bizarrely—there has again been ignorance of the £16 billion North Sea transition deal. What proportion of the oil and gas workforce does the cabinet secretary believe can switch?

Finally, the cabinet secretary talks of domestic production ending and a presumption against new exploration and production. Does he worry that such an approach risks shutting down the industry prematurely, leaving us dependent on imports and undermining the very supply chain that we need to deliver the transition?

Michael Matheson: The member has raised a number of points, and I will try to deal with them in turn.

Let me first turn to the suggestion that in some way we are neglecting the important role that the north-east has played in our energy sector over the years. It is the Scottish Government that is investing half a billion pounds in Moray and the north-east of Scotland through the transition fund to help support that transition—a level of investment that, to date, the member's colleagues at Westminster have failed to step up and offer. That is the type of investment that will support the transition.

The Westminster Government has repeatedly taken the tax revenue from oil and gas but not invested the money back into the north-east of Scotland and the rest of our economy. What we cannot afford to happen this time around, with renewable energy, is to allow that same trick to be played on the people of Scotland. We need to ensure that the investments that are made in our renewables sector deliver economic benefits here in Scotland.

A very practical example that the member might want to think about when it comes to skills and the people in the oil and gas industry who want to transition into the renewables sector, as well as those who want to stay in the oil and gas sector, is investment in carbon capture, utilisation and storage. That technology allows those who work in the industry to remain in the industry, and those who want to move into the industry to do so. The

only reason why that has not happened already is that the UK Government has refused to back the Acorn project.

When it comes to making these decisions, and making sure that we deliver for the future needs of our economy and the energy sector in Scotland, there is one party that we will never take any lectures from. That is the Conservative Party, because of its failure over decades in supporting the energy sector in Scotland.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement.

The long-awaited publication of the draft energy strategy and just transition plan comes at a time when we are facing a cost of living crisis and a climate crisis. The need for a just transition to a low-carbon, affordable energy process has never been more important. However, many of the so-called plans that have been published today are a rehash of existing policies that the Climate Change Committee has said are simply not enough. There is little new that will change the Government's failure to ensure that our transition is a just one.

In 2010, the Scottish National Party promised that there would be 130,000 jobs in renewables per year by 2020. We would be the Saudi Arabia of renewables, it said. The reality behind the rhetoric is that just a fifth of that number of jobs has been delivered, and supply chain contract after supply chain contract continues to go overseas. Therefore, few people will believe the cabinet secretary's commitments today.

However, it is not just the jobs that the Government is offshoring: 90 per cent of the energy from the recent ScotWind leasing round will come through overseas-owned multinationals, which are offshoring the billions in profits.

At a time when Labour in Wales has committed to creating a Welsh publicly owned energy firm, and the next UK Labour Government is committed to a UK publicly owned energy firm, why is there no commitment from the Scottish Government in this strategy to a publicly owned energy firm, to keep bills down and to keep the profits here in Scotland?

Michael Matheson: Let me deal first with the point that Mr Smyth is making about the skills in the energy sector, which is extremely important. As we move forward, it is important that we no longer look at the energy sector as being just an oil and gas sector. We need to look at it in a much more holistic fashion, to include oil and gas, renewables and hydrogen. All of those areas play an important part, and it is important as we go forward that we have the right type of skilled workforce in place to support that.

One of the ways in which we will do that is through the green skills strategy, which we have committed to publishing this year. It will set out in detail the measures that will be taken to help to support the transition within the energy sector and green skills. I am sure that the member will be aware of the recent report by PwC that highlighted that Scotland is the part of the UK with the highest green jobs growth—it is where the fastest level of growth is being seen in green jobs. We want to build on and capitalise on that moving forward.

Let me deal with the member's final point about a public energy company. He will be aware that we considered the possibility of setting up a public energy company in the retail sector, but the present market simply does not allow for that. I am sure that the member will recognise that, for many decades while the Labour Party was in government in Westminster, it failed to put in place any fund to secure some revenue from the North Sea, which could have been invested for future use. It took exactly the same approach that the Westminster Tory Government has taken. For decades, Westminster Governments have quite literally siphoned off the taxes from our oil and gas sector, so we have no benefit to show from them. *[Interruption.]*

The difference that we see with ScotWind and overseas public energy companies is that the Scandinavian companies have oil and gas—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, cabinet secretary. Could we have less sedentary chit chat, please?

Michael Matheson: Scandinavian Governments have had the wisdom to set up funds and companies to invest in such areas. Those countries also have the benefit of being independent, which allows them to free up the finance to make that scale of investment. That is exactly why Scotland should be independent. Not only would we get the revenue benefits from our overall renewable energy sector, we could invest in public infrastructure in our energy sector and have a public energy company that invests in the same way as companies in Norway, Denmark and Sweden have been able to do for decades. Both Labour and the Tories have failed to deliver such a system for decades.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): The people of Scotland have a clear world advantage in terms of access to natural resources such as wind, water and wave. The energy strategy sets out clear targets and ambitions, and it provides the certainty that developers need to invest in development and skills. However, does the cabinet secretary agree that the strategy cannot just enable the exploitation of our resources by international companies for energy transmission elsewhere? It must ensure that Scotland realises the benefits

from access to clean, green, cheaper energy, from the economic activity and from energy and manufacturing jobs here in Scotland. What are the biggest risks to the strategy delivering for the people of Scotland?

Michael Matheson: One of the most important elements of our energy transition is ensuring that the transition is fair and just. We must ensure that Scotland does not simply become a production basin for electricity and hydrogen for domestic and export purposes while not getting any of the economic benefits of that here in Scotland. Even with our limited powers, it is important that we get the supply chain benefits that go alongside such developments.

We saw the impact of the UK Government's withdrawal of subsidies for onshore wind, which resulted in a rapid contraction of the supply chain in Scotland and the UK as a whole. As a result, Scandinavian countries stole a march on us in developing that technology and manufacturing capability. We cannot make that error again.

The strategy sets out a clear pathway to ensure that we maximise not only the potential from our renewable energy base for domestic and export purposes but the economic benefits here in Scotland. Those benefits should come from not only the production value but the manufacturing of the technology that supports that production. If we develop and manufacture that technology here, we can export it to other parts of the world. If we do that, we will be able to deliver a just transition, which is exactly what the strategy aims to do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask for more succinct answers, because I am keen to call all members who have requested to ask a question.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I know that the Scottish ministers find wind power statistics hard to understand, but here is a fact that should give them pause for thought. On 14 December last year, only 3.4 per cent of energy across the UK was generated by wind turbines. Surely a successful energy strategy needs dependable and flexible sources of power, so why will the Scottish Government not stop discounting the possibility of creating small modular nuclear reactors?

Michael Matheson: We could take any particular day and look at the contribution that wind makes to our wider energy mix in the UK. I do not know whether the member has looked at what wind is contributing to the UK grid today in terms of output, but it is in the region of 40 per cent of what the UK grid is using at the moment. However, that will change by the hour and at different times, which is why we set out in the strategy the importance of having an energy mix that involves not only onshore and offshore wind

but tidal, marine, hydro and pumped storage. We want to ensure that we have a mix that gives us flexibility. I am sure that the member will be aware of the developments that are coming in battery storage, and the capacity that that will provide to store the energy that is generated by renewables.

The member referred to small modular reactors. The reality is that SMRs are at phase 1 in the technology development process and probably at least another six, seven or eight years of a technological process needs to be gone through before we even get to the point at which development could be taken forward. They are 10-plus years away. Given the member's consideration of the issue, I would have thought that he would be aware of how far off in the distance SMRs are and that he would know that they are not a reliable way for us to plan to meet energy needs in future.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement, which presents fantastic opportunities for us to move to net zero, to improve energy security and to boost our Scottish economy. What workforce analysis was carried out in preparing the strategy? How did we arrive at the figure of 77,000 jobs? How will we monitor that figure for jobs acquired, and how will that be reported?

Michael Matheson: The figures were drawn from a variety of reports, including one from Robert Gordon University on the potential for development in the renewable and clean energy sector. They are also part of the wider analysis that we have carried out in relation to oil and gas and the transition away from fossil fuels. Reports from Offshore Energy UK and OPITO have also contributed to that. All those reports looked at the potential for the workforce in the green energy sector as we transition. It is extremely important that we maximise the economic and employment opportunities in the energy sector, and that is exactly what the strategy aims to do.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance sight of his statement and of the draft energy strategy and just transition plan, which states:

"We are supporting the reskilling of oil and gas workers by funding an offshore skills passport through our Just Transition Fund."

Such a passport must be more than just an app that tells the user where their qualification gaps are; it must allow for a seamless transition—a fair and just transition—for offshore workers by avoiding costly duplication of training for them. Failing that, the Scottish Government could look at strengthening licensing and leasing conditions to require energy employers to recognise offshore workers' prior training and existing qualifications.

Will the cabinet secretary commit to working with the energy unions to remove financial barriers to transition for Scotland's offshore workers?

Michael Matheson: That is exactly what the passport will do—it will provide seamless movement between the oil and gas and renewables sectors. I hosted the skills summit up in Aberdeen with the trade unions. The STUC and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, which were part of that, warmly welcomed the work that is taking place to deliver exactly that approach. They have stated publicly that a big step forward has been made in delivering that type of passport. What the member is looking for is exactly what the passport will deliver, and that is why we are looking to roll it out this year and why the unions are so supportive of it.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): The draft energy strategy and just transition plan provides a route map of actions that are central to meeting our climate change targets, and the north-east communities will play a significant part in delivery of the plan. Will the cabinet secretary outline how the Scottish Government will ensure that a balance is struck between the need to deliver a just transition and the need to ensure that communities are not only consulted but empowered to make a valid and positive contribution to local delivery and outcomes?

Michael Matheson: Audrey Nicoll raises a really important point. In focusing on delivering a just transition and the economic opportunities that go alongside the transition to a low-carbon energy system, we need to ensure that we take communities with us, because they will be impacted by the technology that is deployed to deliver that system. That is why, for example, with onshore wind, we have good-practice guidance through which we encourage developers to be much more focused in working with communities to allow them to be party to the process and to look at co-production as part of that process. We have rolled out greater community programmes to allow communities that want to develop their own energy network to do so.

Therefore, it is important that we continue to ensure that those who are developing energy production facilities, particularly onshore, are working in partnership with the local communities that will be affected. The guidance that we will put in place is directed at doing exactly that.

I would like to go further and be able to mandate that developers are required to do that, but I am unable to do so because it is a reserved area. I hope that, at some point, the UK Government will see the wisdom of mandating the need to work with communities and for community benefit to be

part of any community programme in the energy sector.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of the statement. I welcome the strategy and, in particular, the acknowledgement of the contribution that tidal and marine energy can make to meeting the ambitions.

The Climate Change Committee highlighted last month that

“Few enabling factors are likely to have a bigger impact on delivering Net Zero ... than the ability to shape”

our

“workforce in time to meet the demands of the transition.”

To be fair, the plan acknowledges that, but there is a mountain to climb to prepare Scotland's workforce. Given the problems that have arisen in meeting earlier commitments to job creation, can the cabinet secretary confirm that the “Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025”, which is due to be updated later this year, will include a detailed and quantifiable route map to developing the skilled workforce that will be needed to fill the 77,000 green jobs that are expected by 2050?

Michael Matheson: I particularly welcome Liam McArthur's comments on tidal and marine energy, which he will obviously have a keen interest in, through his being the local member for the area in which the European Marine Energy Centre is, which is a world-recognised centre for developing that technology.

I agree with Liam McArthur's point that there should be a very clear pathway for delivering the skills, employment opportunities and jobs that will go alongside the transition. We have embedded the just transition plan within the energy strategy so that we can clearly see how they are interlinked. The green energy strategy and the climate skills strategy that we will bring forward this year will reinforce that and provide much greater detail. I hope that they will give the level of detail that the member is looking for, and that we can demonstrate the clear pathway that we are determined to take in order to maximise the jobs and economic opportunities that come from transitioning our energy system.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary will know, Argyll and Bute is a significant contributor to Scotland's energy strategy through onshore wind, offshore wind, wave power and pumped storage, and through Islay being one of the carbon neutral islands. Can the cabinet secretary advise how the Scottish Government will ensure that rural and island communities across Argyll and Bute will see the benefits of the strategy?

Michael Matheson: It is important that Argyll and Bute benefits. One of the ways in which we can achieve that is through the carbon neutral islands strategy that has been introduced, which includes Islay in the member's constituency.

Another piece of work that will complement our strategy is the islands energy strategy, which will be published in the coming year and will set out more detail on how we will ensure that the energy and just transition strategy has the right impact on our island communities, including those within Jenny Minto's constituency.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): A just transition to clean energy requires materials to build the wind turbines, heat pumps, electric cars and other infrastructure that we need. However, we cannot assume that those materials will be readily available. Global demand for resources is rising and we have all seen the shocks to international supply chains. Therefore, can the cabinet secretary confirm what proportion of materials can be sourced through domestic reuse, remanufacturing or recycling and, if not, when an assessment of that will be carried out?

Michael Matheson: I cannot give Maurice Golden the specific details, but he has raised a really important point. During the past nine or 10 months, because energy security has become such a central focus for European countries, the scale of the ambition to transition away from fossil fuel energy systems has grown significantly, so there will inevitably be constraints on availability of materials within the sector. It is impossible for the sector to scale up at the rate at which countries are now looking to transition away from oil and gas and to deliver renewable energy projects. There is no doubt in my mind that there will be material constraints that will have an impact on roll-out of some technology, so the member's point is an important one.

Among the key things that will be central to addressing that are our looking at what we can produce locally in our domestic market including from recycling, repowering of some older onshore wind farms and moving early to secure access to materials.

This is an area in which Scotland has an advantage. We can move earlier than other countries that are now turning their minds to onshore and offshore wind. We are already in that space and are taking forward those technologies. We can help to secure greater access to markets and materials by moving early, which is why the strategy sets out a ramping up of our ambition and of the timeframe in which we want to deliver it. That should help to address the type of issue that Maurice Golden has highlighted.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The science of climate change demands that North Sea oil and gas be phased out. That is the right thing to do for people and planet. Today, Scotland's energy strategy abandons the dogma of maximum economic recovery of oil and gas and sets a path to a renewables future that will leave no workers behind. The UK Government must follow Scotland's lead. What plans does the cabinet secretary have to engage UK ministers on the strategy? Does he share my concern that, unless they change direction on oil and gas, they will undermine not just our ambitions but the whole Paris agreement?

Michael Matheson: There is a section in the strategy that sets out the clear areas of action that the UK Government needs to take forward, and I have provided a copy of the strategy to the UK Government secretary of state who has policy responsibility for the area. We are setting up a task force with the specific role of helping to implement the strategy, and I have invited the UK Government to have a minister join us on the task force in order to address the issues that the UK Government needs to address to drive forward the strategy and deliver on the just transition plan. I hope that the UK Government will work in partnership with us to deliver. We have offered the place on the task force in the spirit of co-operation. It is important that the UK Government is practical and open in recognising its role. I hope that it will take up the offer to join us on the task force in order to drive forward delivery of the strategy and the just transition plan.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary provide more detail on how the £75 million energy transition fund will support our energy sector and the north-east to make progress on the energy transition as we move towards net zero?

Michael Matheson: Four projects have already received funding through the energy transition fund, through which we are investing £75 million in the north-east. Those projects are the Global Underwater Hub, the net zero technology transition zone, the Energy Transition Zone and the Aberdeen hydrogen pub—sorry, the Aberdeen hydrogen hub. The Aberdeen hydrogen pub is an idea, but I cannot see the Scottish Government investing in alcohol sales. *[Laughter.]* Those projects are all about protecting existing jobs and promoting creation of new jobs in the north-east. We will look to build on that as we go forward with funds, in the years ahead.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I agree with the cabinet secretary that Scotland has the potential to be a world leader in production and exporting of green hydrogen, which is a market that is growing fast. However, to gain first-mover

advantage, Scotland needs to invest now at a level that allows fast development of hydrogen production. Many other countries are ahead of us, including countries in the middle east. It is a fast-expanding market. Will the Scottish Government ensure that public investment in and support for green hydrogen match the opportunity and the Government's ambition? This cannot be another Scottish Government promise that is not met with action.

Michael Matheson: I welcome Brian Whittle's support for green hydrogen. I completely agree that there is huge potential. I think that our green hydrogen market will be driven not by domestic demand but by export opportunities. Scotland is in a unique position in Europe to capitalise on that, which is exactly what we are determined to do. The hydrogen action plan that I published last month sets out the export plan for how we intend to go about that.

In October or November last year, we set out our hydrogen proposition to help to support the manufacturing industry in Scotland, and to attract manufacturing in the hydrogen sector into Scotland. We are already engaging with a range of stakeholders in the industry that have an interest in coming to Scotland. They are particularly interested in Scotland because the gateway to delivery of green hydrogen is renewable energy—offshore and onshore wind—and we are already able to set out not just our plans but our targets. Our leasing rounds have already happened, so those companies can see that it will become a reality and that other countries are behind us in achieving that.

I recognise that some countries in the middle east are more advanced than we in the UK and other parts of the world are because of the level of investment that they are making, but members can be assured of our focus on ensuring that we maximise on the opportunity that is provided by green hydrogen. It could be a major economic boost for Scotland for many decades to come.

One of the other reasons why we are in a strong position in taking forward green hydrogen is our oil and gas sector. The skill sets within that sector can transition very well into the hydrogen sector. Few countries in the world that have set ambitious targets for green hydrogen have the skills base that we have, which can drive the whole sector.

That combination of skills in the oil and gas sector and the build-out of our onshore and offshore renewables gives us a real opportunity to be one of the major players, particularly in Europe, in the delivery of green hydrogen for export purposes. We are determined to capitalise on that and to build a hydrogen economy for future generations, because that could become a major part of our economy in the years ahead.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I warmly welcome today's commitment to significantly increasing gigawatt outputs for onshore and offshore wind. Can the cabinet secretary confirm his continued commitment to maximising the potential of solar energy, and can he perhaps touch on some of the reasons why Scotland's solar ambitions require further consultation at this time?

Michael Matheson: The strategy sets out our proposition to extend and develop our solar capacity. We have about 411MW of solar power capacity; we want to look at increasing that. However, before we set a target, we want to consult the sector and the industry in order to understand what the most appropriate target would be for the future. I assure the member that the purpose of the strategy is to look at how we can build and expand our solar sector in Scotland. I hope that, after the consultation period, we will be able to set a clear target for how we do that.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome the ambition in the just transition plans to maximise economic benefit and to ensure fair distribution of opportunity in an inclusive way. However, I fear that that is not what is happening in our communities. Taxi operators in Glasgow are fearing for their jobs and livelihoods if plans to introduce the low emission zones go ahead in June. They are facing significant challenges in ensuring that their vehicles are compliant, including in actually finding compliant vehicles, and drivers have said that they might have to give up their jobs.

The impact of not getting this right is significant. Fewer taxis mean that women have fewer safe options for travelling home late at night—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry to interrupt, Ms Duncan-Glancy, but I need a question because we are running out of time.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: —and disabled people could be stuck in their homes. Taxi drivers are really struggling.

The council has written to the Government to ask for additional funding and—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ask a question, Ms Duncan-Glancy. We are running out of time.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I am moving to my question now, Presiding Officer.

Can the minister update us on whether the Government has received the request for additional funding, and whether it will provide that funding? Will it ask the council to delay the zone until the funding is in place so that Glasgow can keep its cabs on the road and people can continue to rely on them?

Michael Matheson: I understand the point that the member has raised. That issue is not covered by the energy strategy and the just transition plan but by transport policy. I am more than happy to ask the Minister for Transport to write to the member to say whether we have received that letter and what action we are taking on the basis of the information that is provided within it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can squeeze John Mason in, if I get a brief question and a brief answer.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The cabinet secretary mentioned carbon capture, utilisation and storage in his statement. How are the negotiations with the UK Government going, and is it being any more constructive than its predecessors?

Michael Matheson: I am sure that all members recognise the critical importance of carbon capture, utilisation and storage, especially the Acorn project, not just to the Scottish energy transition in terms of delivering on our climate change targets, but because of the significant economic benefits that go alongside it.

We remain deeply concerned by the UK Government's lack of progress on that matter. We have not had any confirmation of the timeline for the track 2 process. At one point, there was an indication that the track 2 process would start before the end of last year, but that has been delayed. We now have no certainty or clarity about the timeframe.

It is absolutely essential that the UK Government does not lose the major economic opportunity that the Acorn project would bring to Scotland. If that is lost, communities from the north-east to Grangemouth will rightly feel bitterly betrayed by the UK Government. We will continue to press the UK Government to ensure that it takes urgent action to address that issue, because it is mission critical for delivery on climate change here in Scotland and across the whole UK. Any further delay will waste money on a project that could be delivered now and could create jobs now. We will continue to press the UK Government to set out a clear timeframe for track 2, so that there is certainty that the Acorn project will be delivered, and swiftly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement on Scotland's energy strategy and just transition plan. I will allow a very short pause to enable front-bench teams to change position before the next item of business.

Independence Referendum

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-07429, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the people's right to choose: respecting Scotland's democratic mandate. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons. I call the cabinet secretary.

16:42

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Every member in this chamber is here today because of the trust placed in us by the people of Scotland, through their votes. Those votes have consequences and, thanks to our system of proportional representation, they matter and allow people to express their choices. That is what democracy is about—making people's choices matter.

There is, of course, more to modern European democracy than just counting votes, but when that fundamental is undermined and people are denied what they have voted for, there is a risk that democracy itself will be undermined.

That places obligations on those of us who win elections. We must do our best to deliver on the mandates that we are given. It also obliges us when we do not win elections—and very few of us are elected at the first time of asking—to respect the decision of the people, acknowledge the result and accept the right of the winner to deliver the commitments that they were elected on. Not to do that, but instead to deny democracy, is a dangerous thing, but it is something that people in Scotland are becoming increasingly accustomed to.

I will focus on the outcome of three votes and on the question of how we who are privileged enough to be elected to Scotland's national Parliament can best deliver what people in Scotland voted for.

The first of those was Scotland's overwhelming vote, in June 2016, to stay in the European Union. By a majority in every single council area, 62 per cent of people in Scotland voted to remain part of the European Union. No part of Scotland voted to leave, yet, two years ago, we in Scotland were removed from the European Union against our will. This week, instead of celebrating 50 years of EU membership, of co-operation, multilateralism and solidarity between nations and of economic development and peace, we are stuck counting the cost of the Tories' reckless Brexit.

The Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that, in the long run, Brexit will reduce productivity

by 4 per cent compared to what it was during our EU membership. That equates to a cut in Scotland's public revenues of around £3 billion every year, heaping further massive pressure on our national health service and other public services.

Those statistics are stark and they mask the human reality of the impact of Brexit: the small businesses that are going under because of the price of importing; the restaurants and hotels that are closing rooms and services because they cannot get staff; the firms that are passing on to customers their increased costs, which is helping to fuel record levels of inflation; the academics and scientists who are no longer involved in world-leading research because they are unable to get funding to collaborate with peers in the EU, which is diminishing our ability to innovate and be at the forefront of discoveries and is threatening our world-class standing; the loss of tax revenues that could have been used to fund public services; and the health and social care sectors that are dealing with a staffing crisis while trying to rebuild from a pandemic.

Brexit is harming everyone in Scotland and there are few reasons to be optimistic. Yes, times are tough globally, and every country is suffering from the effects of the pandemic and the global energy crisis. However, decades of mismanagement, compounded by the folly of Brexit, have left the United Kingdom economy utterly unprepared to weather this storm.

European countries that are comparable to Scotland are wealthier—

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: I will in a moment.

European countries that are comparable to Scotland are wealthier and have lower income inequality, less poverty, higher social mobility, higher—often significantly higher—productivity, greater research and development spending and higher business investment than the UK has. Perhaps the member from the Conservative benches can explain why.

Craig Hoy: On other small independent European nations, perhaps the minister will tell the Parliament how much it costs to see a general practitioner in Ireland and what the prevailing rate of corporation tax is in Ireland.

Angus Robertson: I note that the member from the Conservative benches could not explain why countries that are comparable to Scotland are so much better off. The Conservatives have flimsy arguments for the retention of the United Kingdom.

It gives me no pleasure—none at all—to point out that the decision of people in Scotland to

remain in the EU has been vindicated. Since the Brexit referendum, of course, people in Scotland have voted in every single election for people and parties that are committed to reversing Brexit. In the 2017 and 2019 elections to the Westminster Parliament and in the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections, a majority of MPs and MSPs were elected on mandates to hold an independence referendum so that Scotland could apply to rejoin the EU as an independent member state.

That takes me to the second of the three votes that I want to discuss. An independence referendum was on the ballot paper in May 2021, when this Parliament was elected. Members should not take my word for it; they should believe the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, who said, in the run-up to that election:

“People have to be really clear that a vote for the SNP is a vote for another independence referendum”.

Members should believe the leader of the Scottish Labour Party, who said in 2016:

“Mandates come from the electorate in an election ... it should be the people of Scotland that decide when the next referendum is.”

Members should believe the Scottish National Party and Green manifestos, both of which committed to holding a referendum, in the clearest possible terms, and 72 out of 129 of us here in the Scottish Parliament—a clear majority—were elected to deliver that. The parties that said, “Vote for me and there will be no referendum,” lost, and the parties that said, “Vote for me and we will give you the choice of independence,” won.

That simple act of placing one’s vote next to a candidate or party that pledged in their manifesto an independence referendum is itself an exercise by people in Scotland of their right to choose their constitutional future. That is a right that used to be accepted across the political spectrum. It is a right that the Labour Government in Wales accepts. The Welsh Government said:

“the UK is conceived of as a voluntary association of nations”,

and

“it must be open to any of its parts democratically to choose to withdraw from the Union. If this were not so, a nation could conceivably be bound into the UK against its will, a situation both undemocratic and inconsistent with the idea of a Union based on shared values and interests.”

That right should matter as much to those who oppose independence as those who support it, because what is Scotland within the United Kingdom if we do not have the right to decide to leave? Trapped, stuck—however we vote. Is that the voluntary union that unionists claim?

That brings me to the third vote that I would like to discuss. In 2014, people in Scotland were

offered the choice of independence, and they voted against it. We accepted that result, but here is the question that requires an answer. After the referendum, did Scotland get what the majority voted for? People in Scotland were promised that within the United Kingdom, we would benefit from the economic strength of the UK. Instead, we have suffered from years of economic mismanagement, culminating in the disastrous experiment of a failed Tory budget that cost this country billions and put the final nail in the coffin containing the UK’s reputation for economic competence.

The OECD predicts that the UK will be the slowest-growing G20 nation over the next two years apart from the sanctioned Russia.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: Perhaps the member on the Conservative benches will explain why the UK is doing so badly on international comparisons.

Liam Kerr: On funding choices, does the cabinet secretary think that it is better to fund the Men’s Sheds movement to the tune of £75,000 a year, or fund £1.5 million annually for the work of 25 civil servants to work on an independence prospectus?

Angus Robertson: Given the opportunity to rise to the challenge and explain why the UK is the worst-performing country in the G20 on international comparisons, the member was unable to do so. It is an embarrassment, and the Conservatives should take responsibility for it.

The latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and International Monetary Fund forecasts show that the UK is set to have one of the highest inflation rates among G7 nations in 2023.

People in Scotland were promised that a no vote would secure Scotland’s place in the European Union. Just before the referendum, the then leader of the Scottish Conservatives said in the STV referendum debate:

“It is disingenuous ... to say that no means out and yes means in, when actually the opposite is true. No means we stay in, we are members of the European Union.”

Oh really?

The then Secretary of State for Scotland said in November 2013:

“The only guaranteed way of leaving the European Union is to leave the United Kingdom.”

The better together campaign itself asked the question:

“What is the process for removing our EU citizenship?”

Its answer:

“Voting Yes.”

People in Scotland were promised a new era of respect for devolution, and that the United Kingdom would offer us a partnership of equals. Instead, we have seen the Westminster Government use its House of Commons majority to repeatedly overrule the Scottish Parliament, in breach of the Sewel convention. We have seen a series of power grabs through Westminster legislation changing and limiting this Parliament's powers again and again without our consent, and now we have the UK Secretary of State for Scotland threatening, with a stroke of his pen, to overrule a bill that was overwhelmingly passed in this Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I must ask you to bring your remarks to a conclusion.

Angus Robertson: Indeed.

When the will of a huge majority of elected MSPs in Scotland's Parliament can be reversed by a single figure from the Westminster Government, that shows clearly where sovereignty under the devolution settlement lies. Far from enhancing devolution, giving Scotland more powers and more control, the Westminster Tory Government is undermining and systematically dismantling devolution.

The motion before us says that the decisions of people in Scotland matter; that their votes count and that their future should be in their hands. This is about who decides Scotland's future. Is it the 59 MPs from Scotland or the 591 from the rest of the UK?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude and move the motion.

Angus Robertson: Is it the Scottish Parliament or the Secretary of State for Scotland? Is it a Prime Minister from a party that has not won an election in Scotland since 1955? There is only one answer: the people decide. Democracy demands it.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the decision of the UK Supreme Court in the reference by the Lord Advocate of devolution issues under paragraph 34 of schedule 6 to the Scotland Act 1998; reaffirms its belief that people in Scotland have the sovereign right to determine the form of government best suited to their needs; believes that the United Kingdom should be a voluntary association of nations and that it should be open to any of its parts to choose by democratic means to withdraw from the union, and calls on the UK Government to respect the right of people in Scotland to choose their constitutional future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will allow a wee bit of latitude for members on the other front benches, should they take interventions—although it is entirely a matter for them whether they do,

which is why I allowed a bit of latitude for the cabinet secretary.

I call Donald Cameron to speak to and move amendment S6M-07429.1.

16:54

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): At the beginning of a new year, there might have been an opportunity for a new approach from the Government, but no. Entirely predictably, the Government has chosen the constitution as the subject of its first debate of 2023.

We have an on-going global cost of living crisis, a bitter and violent war in Europe and total turmoil in our public services in Scotland. The NHS is on its knees, primary schools are closed today and many secondary schools are closed tomorrow, and at the top of the Government's list of priorities is another independence referendum. What on earth is it thinking? This debate is nothing short of shameful.

If the passion and energy expended today was concentrated instead on health and education, we would be in a much, much better place, not least because, as a matter of law, it is now unequivocally clear that this Parliament does not have the power to legislate for a referendum on Scottish independence. The Supreme Court's judgment in November was unambiguous. With that in mind, it begs the question why we are here, once again, debating the issue.

It may be that the Scottish National Party needs to give its hard-core supporters some red meat to keep them happy. It may be that the Government has completely run out of new ideas on how to deliver for the people of Scotland. It may be that the only thing that the SNP wants to talk about is the constitution, because it has failed so monumentally elsewhere.

Let us take the NHS as one obvious example. Parliament heard earlier today from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, but only after he received pressure from these benches and others to address the state of the NHS. A statement by a cabinet secretary falls woefully short of the proper and rigorous debate of the issues here in this chamber.

Let me dwell on those failures for a moment, because this is what we should be debating. On Sunday, the deputy chair of the BMA said that patient safety was now “at risk every day” in accident and emergency departments in Scotland, and that the NHS faces an “unprecedented crisis”. On BBC Scotland this morning, Dr Iain Kennedy, the BMA chair, said that

“the NHS in Scotland is broken. Members are telling me that they are exhausted ... burnt out ... considering their futures”.

He went on to say that

“many parts of the NHS”

are

“collapsing, so we have no doubt that the NHS in Scotland in its current form is unsustainable.”

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I am delighted to talk about health. Would Donald Cameron concede that Brexit has been a real problem for the NHS in Scotland, if not the UK? It is one of the reasons why we need the democratic right to decide to go back into the EU as an independent state.

Donald Cameron: As Ms Martin knows, the problems in our NHS in Scotland began long before the vote for Brexit in 2016.

“The NHS in Scotland is broken.”

Those are stark words from one of our most senior doctors. That situation has come about despite repeated warnings that a winter crisis was looming.

Doctors and nursing leaders were not impressed by the measures announced yesterday. This is what we should be debating. Let me give one concrete example. We know that, last week, bed occupancy rates in hospitals were more than 95 per cent. That is 10 per cent over the 85 per cent rate that is seen as the maximum figure before patients are put at risk. That kind of occupancy rate is not sustainable for providing the “safe and effective care that patients need on a daily basis”.

That is what the BMA said, and it is right. If the SNP focused on supporting the NHS and fixing the long-standing problems that exist there, instead of obsessing over independence, perhaps some of those issues could have been addressed.

I make no apology for focusing on these matters, because it is not just the NHS where SNP ministers have lost focus. In education, we know that there are 900 fewer teachers than when the SNP came to power, and that the attainment gap between the least and most deprived is wider than it was five years ago. We know that police numbers in Scotland are at their lowest level since 2008 and that violent crime has risen to its highest level since Nicola Sturgeon became First Minister. We know that, in transport, this SNP Government has presided over the botched nationalisation of Ferguson Marine. The delay of two ferries could result in the cost running to £200 million over budget, with island communities suffering as a result. Failure after failure after failure, and all because this Government has only one real priority.

A Survation poll published on Monday stated that only 8 per cent of people feel that the Scottish Government should prioritise an independence referendum—just 8 per cent.

I turn to the cabinet secretary’s motion. If the SNP were being honest about listening to, and respecting the wishes of the people of Scotland, then it would appreciate that Scotland expressed its view barely eight years ago in the referendum in 2014 that the UK Government agreed to—a referendum that countless SNP members called a “once in a lifetime” referendum. Even the cabinet secretary once called it the “opportunity of a lifetime”. Given that opportunity, the people of Scotland voted decisively to keep Scotland in our United Kingdom and rejected independence. Although Scottish Conservatives and others in the chamber have always respected that outcome, the SNP and the Greens have never done so, which is why the way in which the debate is being framed by the Scottish Government is utterly ludicrous and indeed hypocritical.

The SNP’s and Greens’ obsession with agitating for a referendum that nobody wants is harming our public services. The Government has taken its eye off the ball for too long, and people across Scotland are noticing it. They are seeing the crisis that is unfolding in our NHS; standards falling in education and the attainment gap widening; increasingly poor performances in public transport; and a Government that has its head in the sand when it should be addressing the real and pressing needs of the people of Scotland. It is an abject disgrace.

I move amendment S6M-07429.1, to leave out from “reaffirms its belief” to end and insert:

“recognises that the people of Scotland voted decisively to remain within the United Kingdom in 2014; agrees that another divisive referendum should not be a priority during the ongoing cost of living crisis, and believes that it should focus its time on addressing the pressing issues that the country faces, including the current issues facing the NHS.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Sarah Boyack to speak to and move amendment S6M-07429.3. You have up to six minutes, Ms Boyack.

17:01

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): The fact that we are debating this subject is a disappointment, but it is not a surprise, given the priorities of the SNP and Green Government. Let us look at what has happened over the past few weeks. Over the festive period, we had severe weather that caused significant disruption in many parts of Scotland and put massive pressures on our resilience services. In the run-up—[*Interruption.*] If you respect my right to respond to your opening remarks, cabinet secretary, please give me a couple of seconds.

The point that I am making, which is absolutely clear in the Labour amendment, is that this subject is the wrong choice for our first debate this year. We should be focusing on the NHS. In the run-up to new year, doctors in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde pleaded with the health board to declare a major incident, while NHS Grampian issued an appeal for all staff to come in. When the cabinet secretary referred to NHS Lothian earlier this afternoon, he did not acknowledge the long-standing deep issues of underfunding, the lack of capacity that NHS Lothian now has in an area that is increasing its population and, crucially, the lack of social care. Those were not issues that started during Covid. In fact, they were not even issues that began as a result of our leaving the EU—they were in place long before then. From repeated comments made by representatives of the BMA, we know that they are seriously worried about patient safety being put at risk every single day. I will not be the only member who has received repeated references of constituents who cannot get through to the NHS and end up going to accident and emergency.

SNP and Green members voted against Labour's proposal to debate those issues today, and they opted for their number 1 priority, which is to debate the constitution rather than tackle the health and cost of living crises, which are getting worse.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: I will, briefly.

Alasdair Allan: The member asks why we are talking about independence. We have already—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Allan, please ensure that your card is in and your microphone is on.

Alasdair Allan: It is in.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Is your microphone on? It does not sound like it.

Alasdair Allan: My card is in.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Your microphone is not coming on, so perhaps you could try using another seat. I apologise to Ms Boyack; I will reflect that interruption in the time allowed to her.

Sarah Boyack: I appreciate that, Presiding Officer.

I mentioned that issue because it is up to members to decide what we want to debate. My view is that the choice of this subject is more about internal SNP strategic discussions than it is about the country's interest. Newspapers published before the debate told us that we would

be offered a detailed blueprint for independence, yet what did the cabinet secretary do today? He gave us repeated interpretations of history from his perspective; he did not talk about the future. Once again, he offered us a false choice: the status quo or another divisive independence referendum.

Scottish Labour is not against constitutional change. Over our history we have advocated for and delivered constitutional change. We delivered the Scottish Parliament, which has been strengthened since its establishment. We have done that on a cross-party basis. We have been prepared to speak to people.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No. I have already tried to take one intervention.

I want to focus on the constitutional change that we would like to see—one that is different. We do not support the status quo. We want to empower people and communities. Co-operation is key: nations and regions working together as part of the UK's redistributive union does not need a divisive referendum.

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray): Sarah Boyack says that she respects democracy. The policy put forward by her leader in August 2022 said that the role of the Scottish Parliament is to be the expression of the democratic will of the people of Scotland, yet Labour's amendment today seeks to remove the part of the Government motion that says that the UK should be

"a voluntary association of nations".

That is something that her colleagues in Welsh Labour understand. Why remove that from the motion if Labour supports democracy? *[Applause.]*

Sarah Boyack: Cue applause.

I think that the member will note that our amendment retains the first half of the motion because we agree with the proposals. We acknowledge that there was a decision by the Lord Advocate and we want to reaffirm our belief that people in Scotland have the sovereign right to determine the form of government that is best suited to their needs. We took a decision on that in 2014. That is uncomfortable. Since then, as I said in my opening comments, we have seen a change in the devolution settlement.

My disappointment with Donald Cameron today is his not acknowledging that the status quo is not perfect. We need to change the status quo. We need change in Scotland. The best way to do that

is not to have an independence referendum—*[Interruption.]*

SNP members are making comments about what the voters think. Opinion poll after opinion poll show that even SNP voters do not want an independence referendum this autumn. That is a critical point. There are interpretations of exactly what the voters think. We are here to represent our constituents, and I am determined to do that.

Scottish Labour is working to look at how we change the UK to make it a more radical, redistributive UK. We want to build on devolution—*[Interruption.]* With respect, Presiding Officer, I did not heckle other people when they were speaking although I disagreed with them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Indeed. Members, please listen to the speaker who has the floor.

Sarah Boyack: Gordon Brown's constitutional commission, which Keir Starmer established, formed the basis of the choice that voters will have at the next election. It is not a choice between the status quo or the SNP-Green independence offer. At the next general election, we will have a choice in Scotland: to boot out the Tories, to get rid of the undemocratic House of Lords, to have a directly elected second chamber and to put in place the co-operation that the cabinet secretary who gave the previous statement said was needed in relation to energy and to tackle the cost of living crisis. We would reform inter-governmental working with joint governance councils, secretariats that are not appointed by both Governments—

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Ooh, secretariats!

Sarah Boyack: They do not sound exciting to the SNP, but they are crucial.

I will finish on this point. The SNP Government has been a centralising Government, taking power away from our local authorities and communities. We are now seeing services being cut in our local communities. It is time to reverse that trend. It is not just about giving more powers to the Scottish Parliament; it is about stopping the hoarding of power by the Scottish Parliament and devolving powers to our councils, whether those powers relate to education or how they invest in critical services such as healthcare, support for our health system—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Boyack, I have given you an extra minute. Please wind up your speech and move the amendment.

Sarah Boyack: I will do.

There is a better future than the divisive binary choice that is already being highlighted by the

SNP today. We want radical change. We want to give people powers to tackle the cost of living crisis.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Boyack, please conclude.

Sarah Boyack: We want change now. That is the choice that we would offer at the next election.

I move amendment S6M-07429.3, to leave out from "United Kingdom" to end and insert:

"people of Scotland are frustrated with two governments that are more focused on division and their own priorities, rather than the people's priorities; considers that they should be focusing their time, energy and resources on addressing the cost of living crisis, and the NHS crisis, which is costing lives, and calls on the Scottish Government to focus on delivering the recovery that the NHS urgently needs, as committed to in the Scottish National Party's 2021 manifesto."

17:09

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): What a sorry and divisive start this is to the new year. I sometimes wonder what we are doing here, but here we are again, on a day when our schools are closed, our teachers are on strike and we are in the first period of such industrial action in nearly half a century; when 40 patients—I hear SNP members laughing at this—are dying unnecessarily each week as part of the crisis in emergency care; and when people face the worst cost of living emergency in living memory.

The eyes of the nation are fixed on this chamber, but far from seeing us deal with the priorities that they sent us here to deal with, they see another skirmish in a make-believe battle that SNP and Green parliamentarians are fighting entirely on their own. It is make believe, because there will not be a referendum in October, and the general election will not take its place.

Indeed, it is an act of breathtaking arrogance for the First Minister to state that she can dictate the terms of that election. We go to the country to receive the instructions of the people who send us to chambers such as this one. It is not for a single politician to tell them that their concerns about the cost of living emergency, the climate emergency or the new cold war in which we find ourselves mean absolutely nothing, and Nicola Sturgeon will find that out the hard way.

For the Green Party to join the SNP in such an enterprise is astonishing. It must be the only Green Party in the world to so willingly exchange environmentalism for nationalism. It is a far cry from the party that was first represented in the Parliament by the respected Robin Harper, who, before the turn of the year, said of Patrick Harvie and Lorna Slater's support for the idea of a de facto referendum:

"I can't believe this has happened. Air quality ... knows no boundaries".

We will hear a lot about mandates in the debate; more than that, we will hear about the 2021 Scottish general election. I remember that election. I remember when the First Minister told people who liked her leadership but did not want another referendum that they could still vote for her with confidence. I remember when she pivoted back to being the continuity candidate to see us through the pandemic when the polls shifted against independence, and I remember the 25,500 Edinburgh Western residents who sent me to this Parliament to oppose another referendum. Theirs is the only mandate that I recognise.

All that this debate does is allow SNP and Green ministers to distract attention from their singular failure to get to grips with the issues that really matter to people in their day-to-day lives. Knock on anybody's door on any given day, ask them what they care about and they will tell you: they care about whether their sister can access life-saving cancer care, whether their elderly parents are getting the social care that they need, whether their children are receiving an education and whether they can afford to turn on their heating.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Mr Cole-Hamilton, please resume your seat.

I appreciate that emotions run high in this debate and will continue to run high, but I expect members to listen to whoever is speaking, and I certainly expect that of the cabinet secretary, who has been giving a running commentary throughout Mr Cole-Hamilton's speech.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: The fact is that this Government is completely out of touch with reality. It should be using every waking hour in the chamber to clear NHS waiting times and reduce the crippling cost of living emergency.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I do not have time.

The Government could have chosen any topic at all to debate this afternoon, but it chose this one. At a time when the country is looking for unified determination on the many problems that it faces, the Government is desperate to reheat this dying argument—and it is a dying argument. That can be seen in the language that it uses and the way that ministers conduct themselves in the chamber. The cabinet secretary refers to those of us who do not agree with a second referendum as democracy deniers—that is a page straight out of the Donald Trump playbook. Such things are said by populist identity nationalists the world over. I

hope and expect that the Government's movement will suffer the same fate as Donald Trump's.

The cabinet secretary spoke extensively about winners; well, I was elected to oppose a referendum with more votes than any other candidate has received in the history of the Scottish Parliament. The people of Edinburgh Western had the right to choose, and they chose me. They put their trust in me to do my job, and I will not let them down—and it is time that the Scottish Government did its job.

17:14

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Over the decades, successive UK Governments have used every trick in the book to block the Scottish people's right to determine democratically their future. The current examples are that the vote in 2014 was a once-in-a-generation vote, that there is no demand and that the Scottish Government should focus on the NHS and pressing domestic issues. I will touch on those as I progress.

I will begin in 1979, with a referendum for an Assembly. Better together was in its infancy, but it managed an extraordinary pairing involving Labour's George Cunningham, who introduced the rule that 40 per cent of the electorate had to vote for the result to count. The dead and those who abstained were counted as noes. In fact, 51 per cent voted for an Assembly, but that failed the Cunningham rule. There was an intervention by the Tory peer Sir Alec Douglas-Home two weeks before the referendum, promising more for Scotland if it voted no. I know because I was there. We were also too small, too poor and—this is contradictory—because of oil, too greedy. All that and a yes vote still prevailed against the background of a winter of discontent.

Fast forward some years, and Tory-Labour—otherwise known as better together—formalised its partnership and project fear was revisited. One of the main planks of the no campaign was that a yes vote would throw us out of the EU. There was, of course, the vow from Labour's Gordon Brown: vote no and Labour would enhance devolution. Does that ring any bells? Despite all that, 45 per cent voted for independence.

Twenty-four years have passed since the Parliament came into being in 1999, when SNP MSPs were in a minority. We now have 64 MSPs and eight Green MSPs, all standing openly for independence. That is a majority. The unionists have 57 MSPs. At Westminster, there are six Scottish Tory MPs, four Liberal Democrats, one Labour MP and 45 SNP MPs. However, Westminster blocks a referendum because,

according to it, there is no democratic mandate. If ballot box results do not count, what does?

I turn to Brexit. What a democratic affront. Although 62 per cent in Scotland—from Shetland to the Borders—voted remain, we are out. There was no 40 per cent rule then.

The argument that the Scottish Government should focus on current pressing domestic issues—which it is doing—is the very reason why the need for independence is pressing. There has been economic mismanagement by successive UK Governments, which have squandered the oil and gas revenues. Norway saved trillions, but in the bank of UK plc, there is just a huge international overdraft. We have seen Brown's bank collapse and Trussonomics. The result is that the UK has the highest inflation in the G7, which has led to the right pay demands that we see today. As in the dark days of 1979, now is the very time when Scotland needs independence.

I turn to the Supreme Court ruling that ruled only on the limitations of the Scotland Act 1998. I ask members to read *MacCormick v Lord Advocate*. Lord President Cooper said, obiter—I hope that I have time for this:

“The principle of the unlimited sovereignty of Parliament is a distinctively English principle which has no counterpart in Scottish constitutional law ... I have difficulty in seeing why it should have been supposed that the new Parliament of Great Britain must inherit all the peculiar characteristics of the English Parliament but none of the Scottish Parliament, as if all that happened in 1707 was that Scottish representatives were admitted to the Parliament of England. That is not what was done.”

In Scotland, the people are sovereign. Charles is King of Scots, not Scotland. Ask the people therefore whether they want Scotland to be independent. Give them that referendum. The reason why it is being blocked is that they would say “Yes, we want to be independent.”

17:18

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): Today, the SNP has, once again, chosen to put independence above all the urgent matters that the Parliament should focus on. I receive emails from constituents who are worried about their children's education and safety in the streets, and they are extremely worried about the current state of the NHS. There are much more pressing issues to be debated, such as Scotland's health service, which is at breaking point.

Thousands of people cannot get to see a GP. They cannot get screened for major illnesses. They cannot get an ambulance. They wait for hours at A and E departments. They cannot get cancer treatment on time. The crisis is overwhelming our NHS. It is risking people's lives every day.

I was contacted by a constituent whose 80-year-old uncle fell on new year's eve. She suspected that he had broken his shoulder. She called 999 at 9 pm, 9.55 pm, 11.21 pm, 2.30 am, 4.34 am, 6.30 am and 8.14 am. Seven times she had to phone 999 while her 80-year-old uncle lay in agony, stuck on a cold conservatory floor. That certainly was not a happy new year. Twelve and a half hours after the first call, an ambulance finally arrived. My constituent said:

“The ambulance crews were brilliant, but we are disgusted at what our uncle has been put through.”

On reaching the hospital, her uncle was found to have broken his neck and a shoulder in two places.

Such situations are happening all over Scotland. Front-line workers are doing their best and are making huge efforts to keep people safe. They are focused on doing their jobs for our benefit. If you are a nurse, you do not get to ignore a patient and do what you want. If you are a firefighter, you do not get to ignore a burning building and do something else. And, if you are a police officer, you do not get to ignore a crime because you have other priorities. However, if you are an SNP politician, there is—apparently—no need to focus on the day job.

Today, SNP members are ignoring their duty to the public. They are ignoring the people's priorities. They are talking about another referendum instead of focusing on what really matters.

Today, SNP members are showing how out of touch they are with the real world. They have become detached from reality. They have crisis after crisis to tackle and umpteen problems that need sorting. *[Interruption.]* I will take an intervention if somebody wants to explain to my constituent why we are focusing on independence and why we are not focusing on the NHS. Will someone answer that question?

Alasdair Allan: I thank the member—*[Interruption.]* Is she giving way? I thank the member for giving way. She asks why we are talking about independence. I merely put it to her that her party's former leader, Ruth Davidson, said:

“If the Greens and the SNP, and ... any of the other parties who have declared an interest in independence, get over the line and can make a coalition”

or

“make a majority, get the votes in the Parliament, then they'll vote through a referendum.

That's what democracy is all about.”

Does the member agree?

Sharon Dowey: The member could not tell my constituent why we are standing here, talking about independence instead of talking about the NHS. [*Interruption.*] I was taking my lead from what the cabinet secretary did in relation to interventions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Fiona Hyslop has a point of order.

Sharon Dowey: There are umpteen problems that need sorted, from the ferries scandal to the drug—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Dowey, I ask you to resume your seat.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am having great difficulty in hearing Sharon Dowey because of the member who is sitting to my left. I wonder whether you could remind members that some people are using an inappropriate volume.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Ms Hyslop for her point of order. I have given members a reminder, although I appreciate that emotions are running high. I would not single out the particular member, although I am aware that he was shouting, as were Government back benchers. I encourage everybody, please, to treat with respect those who are speaking. I also encourage Sharon Dowey to move the microphone slightly closer to her, which will help. I can give her a little more time, but she should start to wind up now.

Sharon Dowey: There are umpteen problems that need sorting, from the ferries scandal to the drug deaths crisis and the life-threatening issues in our NHS, but today—yet again—the SNP has focused parliamentary time on another divisive referendum. Normal, hard-working people will be appalled by the SNP Government's priorities. While our constituents go to work every day and put in a shift, SNP ministers keep wasting time in talking about their obsession.

It is a new year. For their resolutions, I urge Nicola Sturgeon and her allies to focus on what really matters. They should make their top priority the crisis in our NHS, not another divisive referendum, and get back to the day job, as everybody else in Scotland is doing.

17:24

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): In 2014, I got to vote for the first time, somewhat unexpectedly. In a panic, I read every book, blog and briefing that I could find to figure out where my "X" should go. The more I read, the more baffled I was that Scotland has let us go this long being stuck in an archaic system that is

designed not to let us make the changes and the progress that we want to make.

Since then, I, along with thousands of others, have voted SNP eight times—in two Holyrood, one EU, two Westminster and two council elections and one by-election—expressing each time my support for independence. Whether or not people agree with my position, it is a matter of democracy and a matter of fact that the SNP has a mandate to bring back the question of independence. If Scotland cannot test the people's will to take decisions into our own hands, this is not a voluntary union. Refusing to allow a vote on something that you disagree with is not the behaviour of an equal partner, nor is it the behaviour of an institution that has any faith in its own arguments.

After a shambolic Brexit, five Tory Prime Ministers and multitude of welfare cuts, none of which Scotland voted for, the situation has changed, and people have a right to change their minds as well. That we are here with yet another clear electoral mandate to hold a referendum but are unable to because Whitehall says no is an outrage, no matter what our constitutional stance is or how we would vote in that referendum. If there is any morality left in Whitehall, MPs must know that their anti-democratic, nonsensical and unsustainable stance is immoral—and, honestly, it is making our case for us. Our voices cannot be heard in this union.

We often refer to the union being broken, but this is its design—the union was not made to give Scotland its say. Whitehall's stance on a referendum is just the most visible example of how Scotland is treated as standard. This is what happens with employment rights, energy policy, trade, immigration, equality, universal credit, Brexit—I could go on. Scotland can vote en masse for SNP MPs who then vote en masse in the Commons only to be shot down by the Government of the day.

It is worth pointing out, in response to criticism so far, that I do not want independence for the sake of it. It is not an end in itself. I do not want to move from one bad system to another. I do not want an independent Scotland that treats disabled people in the way that successive Governments down south have done. I want democracy here to be improved so that there is greater community empowerment, more devolution to councils and clearer representation, so that people know and understand who is making the decisions that affect them. I believe that independence would pave the way for progressive politics to happen. Independence, to me, is a means to an end.

In the Highlands and Islands, Whitehall has utterly failed to even begin to replace the EU funding for rural affairs and economic

development that we previously enjoyed, leaving us worse off to the tune of almost £20 million. We are also struggling to replace the health and social care, hospitality and agricultural workers who no longer feel welcome, thanks to a Brexit that we did not ask for and did not vote for.

Social Security Scotland provides a massive demonstration of how we can do better and be more progressive than Westminster in redistributing wealth and supporting people, rather than judging, stigmatising and gatekeeping. With universal credit still being reserved, the contrast is stark to anyone who so much as glances at the two systems.

We do not just have a mandate to deliver an independence referendum; frankly, at this point, we have a moral duty to do so, for the sake of democracy and for the sake of the Scottish people.

17:28

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): We debate the nationalists' motion today with schools closed across Scotland in the first national teachers strike in 40 years. The last offer that was sanctioned by this Government was seven weeks ago. Our NHS, by the First Minister's account, is in "an unprecedented crisis". Today's debate is not the priority of people across the north-east or the whole of Scotland.

Of course, favouring independence is a perfectly honourable thing to do. I understand why many Scots, in the face of the chaotic incompetence of both of their Governments, think that any change might be worth it. Therefore, let us be clear: there is change coming to Scotland if we choose to vote for it. We can have a more just country without losing our currency, our defence, our markets and a significant share of our budget. We should and can have common cause beyond borders and see our neighbours' child as our own, so that all our ends are bettered together.

It is abundantly clear to me, as only an observer, that those honourable folk who favour independence have been sorely failed by their leadership. However, despite the cabinet secretary's rhetoric, there is a route to the destination that they seek. Build a case through honest deliberation and careful compromise to allow the prosecution of the argument. Build a coalition of those seeking change. Build a consensus—a settled will of the Scottish people—and make it overwhelming. That is how the case for devolution was made and won. No one can seriously suggest that, since 2014, that work has been done by those in the positions to do it.

How about proving the case through the successful use of the powers of devolution? That

is not my idea; once upon a time, it was the SNP's strategy under the whose name shall not be spoken—what a sorrowful disaster that has been. Our precious NHS is in chaos; our schools are closed; our universities are steadily losing their lead; we have the worst drug deaths record in the developed world, with a rate five times as bad as that in the rest of the UK, despite having the same drug laws; we have had long-term sclerotic growth and now recession; we have crumbling infrastructure; our ferries do not sail, with islands locked off from the economy; and our national language is under imminent threat. There is the overwhelming feeling, everywhere we go, that nothing is working as it should.

Ross Greer: I accept that, if the Labour Party wins the next UK general election, it will have a mandate for its constitutional reforms. Why does Mr Marra think that, if our side of the constitutional debate repeatedly wins elections, we somehow lack a mandate to implement our constitutional reforms?

Michael Marra: I have already set out the means by which that case can be prosecuted and won. It has been done before and it can be done again if people have the will and the ability to do it. Build a case, persuade people and win the politics. That is how devolution was won, and it is the way in which the issue can be pursued.

Instead, the Parliament has been invited to participate in the grand pretence that the ruling from the Supreme Court was somehow shocking and unexpected, and that the First Minister, having marched her faithful troops up the hill for the umpteenth time, is doing anything other than playing to the faithful by keeping the kettle billing—another wheeze and another tune on the fiddle while Scotland burns. SNP members claim to be opposed to austerity, but they produced a growth commission that promised to cut further and deeper, year on year. They write social justice reports that back progressive taxation, but then, in election after election, they run on the promise of tax freezes for the middle and upper classes. They always protect power for the party instead of exercising that power for the people.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): Will the member give way?

Michael Marra: No, thank you, sir.

There is a majority for change in this country who want the further devolution of power out of Westminster and into all parts of the UK; the direct empowering of 300 economic clusters so that they can be turbocharged for growth; the abolition of the House of Lords and its replacement with an assembly of the nations and regions; and a

Government that will clean up politics and bring an end to the years of Tory sleaze and corruption.

That is the choice that is now in front of us. The job of this Government should be to make Scotland work again.

17:33

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): It gives me great pleasure to speak in the debate and to add my voice to the just and democratic cause of Scottish independence. It is a belief that I have held all my life. Independence is normal. I can taste how close it is, which is precisely why the unionists in the Parliament get so incoherently angry.

The UK is a failing state. Historically, no other state has been so dependent on imperialism. It has created a culture and a contemporary state that are characterised by what Tom Nairn called

“a tribal state of ... formidable complacency”.

We can see and hear that tribal complacency daily. We are told that, however bad things are, they could only be worse by doing something different—the UK’s very own version of insanity.

The entire post-colonial history of the UK is one of consistent decline and democratic failure, with Brexit being the most recent example, as the cabinet secretary eloquently highlighted in his remarks. As Oliver Bullough put it in his recent book, the UK has become a mere butler to the world, with the facilitation of corruption replacing the exploitation of empire.

The indignation that is shown when example upon example of successful smaller independent states is mentioned is not only symptomatic of UK complacency but betrays a failure of belief in the Scottish people regarding what is possible. For me, that is the great divide. I choose to believe in what is possible, I choose to believe in the Scottish people, and I choose to believe in accepting the responsibility and the agency that will come with independence—as many other small and medium-sized countries have done—which will be both liberating and enabling.

We are left in the ludicrous position in which those who are devoted to the declining UK state, no matter the cost to Scotland, cannot state what the democratic route to independence is for the Scottish people. At the same time as we rightly support the independence of other nations, we are expected to believe that a gathering of mainly English MPs in Westminster should have a permanent veto on Scottish democracy. That is absurd and it is fundamentally anti-democratic.

The enduring characteristic of the Scottish independence movement is its commitment to

using democratic means. However, there are multiple democratic pathways to independence, as the history of the United Nations testifies. There is no statute in international law or in any UN charter that gives any state the untrammelled right to deny a nation a democratic route to independence. A referendum may seem the simplest route, but it has not been the most typical route to achieving independence. The will of a people can be exercised in many ways.

For example, the historically significant UN resolution 435 paved the way for Namibian independence and included defining a democratic process leading to an election and not a referendum. Part of that process involved the use of a UN transition assistance group. The cabinet secretary might wish to consider the Scottish Government taking the initiative to appoint its own transition assistance group, drawing on appropriate expertise from beyond Scotland.

Independence is coming and the democratic voice of the people of Scotland will not be denied.

17:37

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Five parties were elected to the Parliament at the most recent election. By any normal measure, those of us who believe that Scotland’s future should be in Scotland’s hands won that election. The Scottish Greens and the SNP increased our combined majority of seats and won more votes—16,000 more—than the Conservatives, Labour and the Lib Dems. When people vote for political parties, they reasonably expect them to fulfil the commitments in their manifestos. Therefore, when anti-independence politicians take offence at our claim that they are opposing not just independence but Scottish democracy itself, the question for them to answer is, “What else do you call it when those who have lost an election prevent the winners from fulfilling their democratic mandate?”

Do not take our word for it. Ahead of last year’s election, Douglas Ross said:

“People have to be really clear that a vote for the SNP is a vote for another independence referendum.”

His Conservative colleague for the Lothians Jeremy Balfour helpfully stated:

“Just remember a vote for the Green Party is a vote for Independence.”

Former Tory leader Ruth Davidson was even clearer. She said:

“if the Greens and the SNP and the SSP, or any of the other parties who have declared an interest in independence, get it over the line and can make a coalition, make a majority, get the votes in the Parliament, then they’ll vote through a referendum. That’s what democracy is all about.”

Back in 2016, Labour leader Anas Sarwar observed that

“Mandates come from the electorate in an election”.

If those people do not believe any of that any more, it is for them to explain how they reconcile whatever their new belief is with their claim to still respect Scottish democracy.

All of us on the pro-independence side of the debate accept the judgment of the Supreme Court. This Parliament cannot legislate for a referendum without a section 30 order from Westminster. However, the UK’s constitutional settlement is based heavily on precedent, and the precedent here is clear. In 2011, for the first time, a clear majority of pro-independence MSPs was elected. The UK Government accepted that as a mandate for a referendum, and a section 30 order was granted. Therefore, why, a decade later, when the Green and SNP manifestos were even clearer and independence was a much more widely understood issue, have not just the UK’s Tory Government but its Labour Opposition rejected that precedent?

Precedent can be rejected but, if the Tories and Labour want to claim that they still respect Scottish democracy and the views of the Scottish public, the onus is on them to explain their alternative method for the people of Scotland to exercise their right to choose their own future.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Would Ross Greer agree that it is totally undemocratic and, quite frankly, a disgrace that, in 2023, we have folk 25 years old and under who have never been able to have a say on whether their country should be independent, and that they are their own generation?

Ross Greer: That is a really important point. There are half a million people on the electoral register in Scotland who have not had the opportunity to cast their vote on Scotland’s constitutional future. That, to me, is the definition of the generation that our colleagues in the Opposition like to speak about so much.

Winning an election used to be the uncontroversial gold-standard mandate for delivering your manifesto. The Tories and Labour have trashed that democratic norm for no better reason than that they lost the election and they do not like who and what the public chose instead. They need to be prepared to accept the accusation of being anti-democratic, because that is exactly what they are being.

I believe that Scotland can be a fairer, greener country with the powers of a normal independent nation. We can rejoin the European Union and begin undoing the damage of a disastrous Tory Brexit, which is now also endorsed by the Labour

Party. We can take basic steps to improve the quality of life for the vast majority of people who live here, such as raising the minimum wage beyond the poverty pay levels that are set at Westminster. We can undo not just the anti-trade union acts of the post-2012 Tory Government but every bit of anti-union legislation that has been passed since Thatcher began her assault in the early 1980s. Scotland can be a beacon of workers’ rights and environmental rights. We could reduce emissions and fund the just transition with a carbon tax on big polluters, and end the licences of any new oil and gas fields in the North Sea.

I believe in Scottish independence, but, first and foremost, I believe in democracy. If the anti-independence parties are offended by the independence movement’s claim to now be Scotland’s democracy movement, maybe they should stop thwarting what the public actually voted for and accept that it is time to put the question to the electorate once again.

17:41

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): As I do not get out much any more, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this first, and extremely good-natured, debate of the new year.

I begin by saying that I do not think that it is enough to say “bad SNP”. I think, charitably, that at the heart of the Government motion is a question: what is the legitimate and democratic route to a second referendum? What I absolutely believe is that eight years of trading insults across the chamber, which is largely what we have done since 2014, has not advanced the argument one iota or one jot.

I agree in part with Michael Marra that there are democratic routes towards another expression of Scotland’s opinion; they just do not happen to be ones on which we agree. First, since the Supreme Court has determined that responsibility for the constitution rests at Westminster, it is for MPs elected from Scotland, as Mr Gray and Mr Robertson were, to argue in the House of Commons in favour of a second independence referendum and to seek, as Mr Marra did, to persuade and to construct a consensus around the argument that that second referendum should take place. They say, inevitably, that that is not a prospect that can succeed; I do not fundamentally agree.

Neil Gray: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackson Carlaw: Time is short, but I may come back to Mr Gray.

The second thing is to respect the view of the First Minister and others at the time, which was

that it was a once-in-a-generation vote. Never in the eight years since has there been a discussion as to what a generation is—a negotiation as to what, in this chamber, we could agree that a generation might be.

It is typically argued in print that a generation is between 20 and 30 years—25 years, typically. It is said that there are three or four generations in any 100 years. Arguably, that might say that this Parliament could legitimately, on the words of the First Minister, look to another referendum in 2039, but it is a subject about which the Government has never sought to engage other parties in the Parliament in any discussion whatsoever.

What Mr Robertson did in the debate was to keep returning to the concept of mandate. He said again that the Conservatives have not had a mandate in Scotland since 1955. I think that he said that votes matter—“votes count”—without a shred of irony, but sitting in his Government are members of the Scottish Green Party, which is participating with the lowest share of the vote of any governing party in the history of the United Kingdom: 91.9 per cent of the people of Scotland rejected the Scottish Greens and all they stand for at the 2021 election.

John Swinney: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackson Carlaw: I will—in a second.

It was even worse in my west of Scotland region, where my Eastwood seat is, because, there, Mr Greer—who disports himself quite obviously as the self-ordained minister in waiting—was rejected by 92.9 per cent of the people of Scotland. What mandate does that man have to stand up and boast that he is imposing Green policy on the people of Scotland?

John Swinney: I am grateful to Jackson Carlaw for giving way. I point out the irony of his attack on the Bute house agreement between the SNP and the Greens, given that it comes from a Conservative who was prepared to usher austerity into the United Kingdom with the accompaniment of only the Liberal Democrats, who are roundly rejected across the United Kingdom. I point out the absurdity of the argument that characterises what Jackson Carlaw has put to us this afternoon.

Jackson Carlaw: If the Deputy First Minister checks the voting record, I think that he will find that the Liberal Democrats had something like 25 per cent of the vote when that coalition was formed.

However, as we saw from the Supreme Court, there is a route for negotiation with the House of Commons or, in the meantime, to accept the responsibility of this Parliament.

Between 2011 and 2016, when I was Conservative spokesperson for health, I agreed to an offer to take the national health service off the football pitch, in an effort to work together to find a consensus around how we might proceed. As Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Alex Neil even convened meetings between all the parties, but all of that was set aside when the 2015 election came about.

If the health service is struggling in England under the Conservatives, in Wales under the Labour Party and in Scotland under the SNP, by what conceit does any one party think that it can say, “We and we alone can now offer a solution to the crisis that is evolving on health.”? Would it not be far better to listen to people such as Wes Streeting, on whom I read with interest an article at the weekend? He talked about having a working partnership with the private sector and a new model for GP primary care.

Would it not be far better to listen to those people who have talked about reopening the Nightingale wards as places where early discharge patients could go in order to free up space in our NHS, or to GPs such as our own Sandesh Gulhane? Would it not be far better for us to work in concert to seek a solution, rather than individually firing forward ideas that everyone else shoots down? The NHS carries on and workers do so in despair, but there is no political solution whatsoever.

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

Jackson Carlaw: Finally, does this Parliament have a future that is based on the model that its creators and pioneers envisaged for it? That model was for this Parliament to evolve the greatest possible consensus on issues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Carlaw, you need to resume your seat.

Jackson Carlaw: Bludgeoning ourselves on the divisive issue of independence is setting aside all the work that we could do on those priorities for Scotland.

17:47

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Presiding Officer,

“The Scots, being an historic nation with a proud past ... As a nation, they have an undoubted right to national self-determination ... Should they determine on independence, no English party or politician would stand in their way, however much we might regret their departure.”

Those are the words of Margaret Thatcher. Perhaps Rishi Sunak might reflect on that principle from one of his heroes. After all, he believes in mandates, and I know that he does because, on

15 December 2019, Reuters reported that, during his Andrew Marr interview as deputy finance minister, he said:

“The overriding mandate that we have from this election result is to get Brexit done ... We will leave the EU in a matter of weeks”.

That irony surely cannot be lost on the Conservative benches.

Let us turn to our colleagues on the Labour benches. The most powerful Scottish party for decades was so dominant that it used to weigh its votes rather than count them, but here it is, scrapping for every vote that it can muster, as a result of its utter betrayal of the traditional vote, which has left it languishing in the lowly third place of Scottish politics. However, Labour has still learned nothing, as Sarah Boyack has just mentioned.

Keir Starmer helped launch the party's latest incarnation of a federal solution to the problems of the UK. On 5 December last year, he was asked by Glenn Campbell whether he had the courage in Scotland to test those ideas against independence. He answered:

“We are being absolutely transparent and clear about this. Those are the recommendations ... We will put those missions before the electorate and if we are elected into power we will have a mandate then to carry it out.”

That is why Labour is finished in Scotland. Over generations, its leaders believe that only mandates that are delivered by an English majority carry any value or weight. For Labour, the Scottish vote is nothing more than a means to bolster its position without the need to deliver what the people demand, which is the right to choose our constitutional future.

On 3 July last year, Alex Cole-Hamilton was asked by Martin Geissler whether, if the SNP won a general election, that would constitute a mandate? He replied, “No, not at all”. In the same interview, however, he was reminded of his own party's manifesto commitment in the 2019 general election that it would simply reverse the Brexit decision. His response to that point was that his party did not win the election, but we did. By the rationale of Mr Cole-Hamilton's argument, therefore, we in the SNP should simply declare independence, but we will not. It is not this party's policy not to allow the people to have their say, unlike the other three unionist parties in the debate.

It is for that reason that the lady who deserves the final words of my contribution is Winnie Ewing. As the opening speaker for the SNP in the Queen's speech debate in 1977, she said:

“the national movement of Scotland will not go away. If the people of Scotland are satisfied with a mini-Parliament, that is what they will have. Although we shall go on

protesting that they want more, if the Scottish people do not want more we shall not win elections after that. It is a simple matter of democracy.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 8 November 1977; Vol 938, c 572.]

It is a simple matter of democracy and, if other parties believe in democracy, their denial of it should worry them far more than the outcome of a referendum.

17:51

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): As always, this has been a fascinating debate at the start of the year, but we are being presented with a false choice. We have the SNP's costly obsession with independence and we have the Tories' status quo. There is a third way. At the next general election, Labour is offering the choice of a stronger Scotland in a transformed UK.

Why should that be important? When we look at what leads the news tonight, it will not be this debate. It will be the stories of the children who could not go to school today because of a strike. It will be the stories of the NHS in crisis—our beloved NHS, which every party in the Parliament has said, at various times, is so important. We have already heard stories of people waiting for hours and hours for ambulances or in accident and emergency. We will hear about the crisis of heating, living and feeding, and the pressures that families are under as parents have to take a day off work to look after their children, who should go to school today but cannot. We hear about people working from home in the post-Covid way because they can, and the stresses that are being put on our communities—the very communities that so many members have said today voted for them or voted for the other party. Those communities are not concerned about an argument about independence. They are concerned about how they are going to put food on the table for their families, what is going to happen at the weekend, and what will happen in the future should one of their children fall ill and they have to try to get to a hospital.

That is the reality not just for people in Scotland but for those in England, Wales, and Ireland, and indeed across Europe to many different levels. We are facing crisis upon crisis, and today we are spending time arguing, discussing and debating the differentials over an independence vote.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the member accept that there are 129 of us and we can deal with a lot of issues at the same time, including the short-term crisis and the long-term future?

Martin Whitfield: Really? The crisis that we had in the chamber when we sat until the early hours of the morning before Christmas, and the fact that

we have today faced business motions requesting debates on the NHS mean that, with the greatest respect, I struggle to see the Parliament's ability to deal with more than one thing at a time. That comes from the attitude of the Government towards this Parliament and the attitude of some members of the Parliament to how Government business should be conducted.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Do committees not sit at the same time?

Martin Whitfield: Do you want to intervene on that point?

Gillian Martin: As a committee convener, you must see when you look at the Parliament's daily timetable that committees deal with different matters all the time in parallel with one another. That was a ridiculous thing for Martin Whitfield to say.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please speak through the chair.

I encourage members not to make interventions from a sedentary position, and those who are speaking not to take interventions that are made from a sedentary position.

Martin Whitfield: We can discuss that comment. It is true that committees cannot sit while the chamber is sitting. In essence, that is an example of doing just one thing at a time. We need to change and develop so that the Government can be held to account.

I humbly suggest that we also need members of the Parliament to show a level of respect if we want to conduct debates in the way that people indicate that they want debates to be conducted, rather than having shouting matches.

I am desperately conscious of time, which is a shame, because I wanted to talk about the opportunity that Europe offers through the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and through national delegations to the congress on which SNP, Labour and Conservative elected officials from across the UK and Scotland sit and where they can influence European debate.

I finish by asking the cabinet secretary a question. He opened with a powerful statement about how people should respect winners and what they do. The fact remains that, unfortunately for us, and perhaps in part due to the investment that certain parties here made in the Brexit campaign, the referendum was won by people who wanted to leave Europe. Should we respect those winners?

17:56

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I am delighted to stand here to debate a

manifesto commitment that my constituents voted me in to deliver. The SNP won the Scottish election with a commitment to hold a referendum at front and centre.

I begin by addressing my colleague Jackson Carlaw, who spoke of the Tory, Labour and SNP Governments struggling with the crisis in the NHS. There is a stark difference between those Governments. The Tories can borrow more money and can change immigration policy, but they choose not to. That is the terrifying fact.

In 2021, I included an independence referendum in my campaign materials and social media posts, as did my opposition, who made a plea to reject an independence referendum. Talk about obsessive: their materials contained more talk of an independence referendum than mine. I won a majority, as my colleagues did, by advocating for Scotland's inalienable right to independence. It was on that basis that we formed a Government.

There may be cries from the Opposition seats to halt or stall an independence referendum. They use myriad excuses, but we know from experience that many of those excuses for staying put in this toxic and declining union are actually the very reasons for leaving it. At the very least, they are reasons that highlight the need for the Scottish people to be presented with the question, "Should Scotland be an independent country?"

Not only do people deserve what they vote for, they have a right to it, and certainly during the parliamentary session in which they vote for that. The choices that I am here to make come from the people, were decided on by the people and should be carried out, by us, on behalf of the people.

The unionist parties had the chance to convince the nation, but they failed. They have a right to present a case to oppose independence, but they have no mandate to remove the choice. It is undemocratic and is a shameful dismissal of the marks on ballot papers that brought us all here. What exactly would that be telling the people of Scotland? Does it say that, ultimately, it does not matter what they vote for, because politicians in Westminster can overrule that? The Supreme Court judgment laid bare for the world to see that this union is neither consensual nor democratic, which is something that should be of immense concern to us all.

How dare politicians who Scotland did not vote for tell us what we can and cannot do? I cannot bear the patronising remarks that I hear. It is condescending to tell the electorate that what they voted for might not be what they need. It is pompous, arrogant, rude and belittling. Do they really think that it is their place to tell the people what they want? We are here to give the people of

Scotland what they want and what they elected us to do. We can listen to the cries about decisions made in past elections, but that Scotland and that UK are no longer recognisable. We have been through the wringer, much of it inflicted by ideological party politics. We gave the union a chance. Now, we are reaping what was sown and it is rotten: Brexit, a fishing sector that was sold out, labour shortages and red tape that could wrap the globe thrice.

I plead with the British nationalists who are in the chamber to have some integrity and be bold. I plead with them to stop standing in the way of democracy and be brave in their convictions. If they are that sure that their convictions are worthy of support, they should put them to the people and ask them. The people pay our wages. They gifted us the honour of representing them. Democracy is not just for those who agree with us; that is something else entirely.

I look forward to the people choosing a fairer, richer, cleaner, more equal and more outward-looking country, one that is not constrained and stripped of all its parts in some UK scrapheap. I fully support the motion and look forward with high hopes.

18:00

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): We return to Parliament with our NHS in a humanitarian crisis. The deputy chair of the BMA Scotland has described hospitals across Scotland as “not safe” for patients. There are 4,977 patients waiting more than eight hours in our A and E departments. That is the worst figure on record. There are 2,506 patients waiting more than 12 hours in A and E departments. That is also the worst figure on record.

As we have heard from many members, it is a new year, but we begin with an old and tired argument. Instead of beginning 2023 with a relentless focus on the crisis facing health and social care in this country, the first debate in the Parliament is to discuss the constitution.

That is all to distract from the reality of an NHS in Scotland that has been pushed to the brink. The situation has been 15 years in the making with this Government, and a Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care who has failed to show leadership and intervene to avert the current crisis and who has lost all credibility. Front-line health and care workers, patients and the public have no confidence in Humza Yousaf’s ability to deal with the crisis that is engulfing our NHS, but that is not the debate that we are having. What does that say to our constituents who are waiting for hospital treatment, struggling to see their GP or lying on a hospital trolley in A and E?

I have found the debate unedifying because our NHS is on its knees and I do not know what our hard-working health and social care staff will think as they watch the debate. Throughout it, SNP and Green members have been keen to assert what Scotland needs and wants. They have spoken of their mandates, but I could paper the walls of Bute house and St Andrews house with all the Government’s broken promises. What of the mandate on which it was elected on ferries, free bikes, school meals, a nationalised energy company, student debt and the council tax? The list goes on and on—only one thing matters to the Government when it comes to delivery.

Let us think about the reality of what the people of Scotland want. Polling this week revealed that more than two thirds of Scots think that the Scottish Government could and should do more with its existing powers to address the cost of living crisis. The reality is that the priority issues for Scots are the cost of living crisis, jobs and our NHS. Indeed, 61 per cent of Scots believe that the Scottish Government is failing on the NHS. Today has given us another example of an inadequate response to that crisis by the Government.

When asked to list what the Scottish Government should prioritise, Scottish people have been clear. The top three issues are the NHS, the rising cost of living and exorbitant energy bills. Only 8 per cent of Scots said that independence should be a priority for the Government.

It is no surprise to anyone in the chamber that the Scottish National Party—or, indeed, the Scottish Green Party, which seems to have forsaken all else in its policy agenda—wants independence. However, it is telling that the Government continues to pursue that agenda with an evangelical zeal despite the vast majority of Scots, including a majority of people who would consider supporting independence, stating that that is the wrong priority at the wrong time.

It is clear that people in Scotland want to see change. Across Scotland, communities are being let down by both of their Governments. They are being let down by an arrogant and reckless Tory Government in Westminster and an incompetent SNP-Green coalition, which is more interested in pursuing this debate today than in talking about the failings in our NHS and doing something about them—two parties that are locked in a co-dependent relationship of grudge and grievance. Scotland deserves so much better than that—so much better than the divisive debate on the constitutional settlement that we see consistently played out. My colleague Michael Marra articulated that most powerfully in what was an excellent speech.

People want a better form of politics than we have seen here today in the chamber. People want a politics that serves the national interest, brings people together and seeks to solve our collective challenges together. It is only the Labour Party that has the energy, ambition, and ideas to radically reshape our democratic settlement and empower communities in Scotland and across the UK. *[Interruption.]* The howls of derision from SNP members show that they are afraid of a Labour Government being elected at the UK level.

In practice, a UK Labour Government will abolish the antiquated House of Lords and replace it with an elected assembly of the nations and—*[Interruption.]* They do not want to hear this!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr O’Kane, please resume your seat.

We have listened to most speakers in the latter half of the debate with respect. Members can disagree with what a speaker is saying without trying to drown them out.

Mr O’Kane, I encourage you to bring your remarks to a close.

Paul O’Kane: They do not want to hear it, but I have a democratic mandate and as much right as anyone else in the chamber to stand here and make these points.

Let me be clear, in my final seconds, that changing our UK and changing Scotland within it is the change that this party chooses. It is a change that we will deliver at a UK general election.

18:07

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): Let me begin by saying how disappointed I am that we are not discussing more pressing matters: families hit hard by the cost of living crisis, businesses struggling with energy bills or the emergency engulfing our health service. We should be discussing our NHS today, as my colleagues Donald Cameron, Sharon Dowey and Jackson Carlaw have highlighted. Iain Kennedy said:

“Many doctors remain to be convinced that the Scottish Government’s practical response matches up to the huge scale of the problems the NHS is facing.”

That is no wonder, given that the Scottish Government has lost focus. Instead, it is once again forcing us to discuss its grievance agenda—something that we have heard from every nationalist speaker to a greater or lesser extent today.

Sarah Boyack spoke about a new way forward and the work of Gordon Brown. Alex Cole-Hamilton, in a passionate speech, outlined how

the Scottish Government is out of touch with reality and the Greens have traded environmentalism for nationalism.

Let me be clear: I believe in democracy and that Scotland has the right to decide its future, but the question of independence has been settled and the will of the people must be respected. Going forward, there is much that Jackson Carlaw can offer this Parliament—and, indeed, Scotland—with regard to the way forward.

The obvious question is, why does the SNP keep ignoring the referendum that we had in 2014?

Alasdair Allan: The member reflected on the fact that Jackson Carlaw indicated the way forward. As I recall, Jackson Carlaw said that the way forward was through making these arguments at Westminster. Does the member acknowledge that for the last few elections, the overwhelming majority of people whom Scotland has sent to Westminster have been of my point of view and not his? Will he not come to acknowledge that at some point?

Maurice Golden: The point that the nationalists are struggling with is that, if a councillor at a local government election has it in his or her manifesto that they will increase income tax, they cannot do it, because the institution that they serve does not have the power to do so.

The referendum in 2014 was free and fair—*[Interruption.]* I would like to make some progress. That referendum saw Scotland vote decisively to remain part of the United Kingdom. According to the SNP at the time, that removed the question of independence for at least a generation. Why, then, will the SNP not respect—

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Excuse me, Mr Golden. Could members give Mr Golden the respect of listening while he is speaking?

Maurice Golden: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Why will the SNP not respect the result of that referendum? Let me give members the answer. It is because it lost. It has never been able to accept that, so it wants to keep running referendums until it gets the answer it likes. It makes its talk of democracy, mandates and respecting the will of the people so horribly hollow. Such is the SNP’s intent to overturn the 2014 decision that it even took to the courts to try to force through another referendum, wasting more than £0.25 million of taxpayers’ money before the Supreme Court unanimously ruled against it.

Let us be clear. The Scottish people do not want another referendum any time soon. An Ipsos MORI poll last month found that just 35 per cent of people supported a referendum in 2023. Thwarted

by the courts, and with public opinion against it, the SNP now wants to turn the next general election into a de facto referendum. The absurdity of the idea should be obvious to everyone. As the constitutional politics expert Professor James Mitchell explained, there is no such thing as a de facto referendum. It is not for a political party to dictate the terms of an election.

The case for independence has never been strong. The SNP has no credible answer for why Scotland should leave the most successful political union in history—a union that benefits Scotland enormously, from the £12 billion union dividend that allows Scotland to spend more on vital public services, to the hundreds of millions being directly invested in local communities, and from the shipbuilding jobs on the Clyde to the vast quantities of trade that flow freely between Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Let us also remember that, during the pandemic, the UK Government protected almost a million Scottish workers and nearly 100,000 Scottish businesses. It was an enormous show of support for Scotland, demonstrating both the value of the union and that we are at our best when we are united. The people of Scotland understand that, which is why poll after poll has shown that the majority of Scots want to remain part of the United Kingdom.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): The member has mentioned democracy, mandates and the will of the people, and he has told us that the Scottish Government is out of touch. Does he really mean that the Scottish people are out of touch, because they are the ones who voted for a referendum?

Maurice Golden: Not according to the SNP leader, Nicola Sturgeon, who said that a vote for the SNP in 2021 was not a vote for independence—perfectly clear. Incidentally, that is the same First Minister who said that she detests hundreds of thousands of Scots, which is, in my view, a deplorable act from the First Minister of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: Please draw your comments to a conclusion, Mr Golden.

Maurice Golden: The First Minister takes the hardship facing families and tries to make it about independence, saying that the cost of living crisis highlights

“the pressing need for independence.”

With that obsession with independence above all else, is it any wonder that so much has gone wrong under this SNP-Green Government? Education has gone backwards in international rankings. We have the worst drugs death rate in Europe and the worst A and E waiting times on

record. The Government’s approach to tackling climate change is embarrassing, and there have been so many other failures. This debate has been a wasted opportunity to tackle those issues. The Scottish Government must stop acting like a pressure group for independence and more like the Government that it is supposed to be.

The Presiding Officer: I call Neil Gray to wind up the debate. You have up to nine minutes, minister.

18:14

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray): Part of the motion that we are debating invites us to reflect on the recent judgment of the UK Supreme Court, which noted that votes cast in an independence referendum

“would possess the authority, in a constitution and political culture founded upon democracy, of a democratic expression of the view of the Scottish electorate.”

Unfortunately, the Supreme Court ruled that, under our devolution settlement, a referendum to allow such a democratic expression of the views of people in Scotland would itself be incompatible with Westminster sovereignty and therefore outwith the powers of the Scottish Parliament. Without a change to this Parliament’s powers, we cannot ourselves legislate for an independence referendum.

However, that does not mean that a mandate to give people in Scotland a choice about their future cannot be delivered in a Scottish Parliament election. The precedent of the 2011 election is clear. When people elect a Parliament on a clear mandate to deliver a referendum, both of Scotland’s Governments should listen to that and facilitate such a referendum. At that time, the UK Government had no difficulty in accepting that a mandate could be delivered through an election to this Parliament. It was right to accept that, and it should be doing so again now. This is Scotland’s national Parliament. If a mandate cannot be delivered in a Scottish Parliament election, where can it be delivered?

Some members raised the subject of opinion polling. Incidentally, six of the past seven polls going back to November last year showed a majority in support of independence. However, no opinion poll can give a Parliament a mandate; only votes can do that. I invite those who would quibble about that, or try to speculate about what people in Scotland really want when they elect a Parliament, to reflect on the consequences of their position for democracy. After all, in 2011, the polls showed no overwhelming support for independence when the UK Government accepted the Scottish

Parliament's mandate to deliver a referendum. No; when it comes to exercising their constitutional right to choose their future, people in Scotland do it at the ballot box—in elections.

I am surprised that there is any doubt in the chamber that people in Scotland alone have the right to choose their constitutional future. It used to be accepted across the political spectrum. Margaret Thatcher said

“As a nation,”

the Scots

“have an undoubted right to national self-determination ... Should they determine on independence no English party or politician would stand in their way.”

John Major said, of Scotland, that

“no nation could be held irrevocably in a Union against its will”.

After the 2014 independence referendum, the report of the cross-party Smith commission said that

“nothing in this report prevents Scotland becoming an independent country in the future should the people of Scotland so choose.”

The 1989 claim of right, which was endorsed by cross-party votes of both the Westminster and Scottish Parliaments, affirmed

“the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of Government best suited to their needs”.

None of those quotes—not even those from Conservative and Unionist Prime Ministers—describes a right to choose as long as Westminster agrees. That is what disappoints me most about Labour's amendment.

Labour sought to remove and delete the section of the Government's motion that says:

“the United Kingdom should be a voluntary association of nations and that it should be open to any of its parts to choose by democratic means to withdraw”.

Those words were lifted almost entirely from a report from the Labour Welsh Government, which confirms the distance that the leadership of the Labour Party in Scotland has come—I say leadership, because I do not think that all of Labour's members or voters will agree with that position; the Scottish Trades Union Congress certainly does not. The leadership of the Labour Party has reneged on what it signed up to in the agreement on the Smith commission. It has also reneged on the report that it published in August last year, which said:

“The role of the Scottish Parliament is to be the expression of the democratic will of the people of Scotland.”

It is therefore little surprise that Opposition parties have not much enjoyed the tag of being democracy deniers that has been levelled at them

in the debate. To paraphrase Alister Jack's duck analogy, if they try to block a debate about Scotland's democratic choice, if they refuse to accept the result of the Brexit referendum or the outcome of the last Scottish Parliament election or if they refuse to allow the people of Scotland to have their say over their future that they have voted for, then they are democracy deniers.

It is not enough to say warm words about the right to choose—we need actions. It has to be made real. There is no meaningful right to choose if the people of Scotland can simply and perfunctorily be told by the UK Prime Minister, “No”. Respecting the right to choose and putting the words that I have quoted into action means coming to the table, entering discussions and accepting—as we accept—that while we may never agree about the ultimate destination of Scotland's constitutional journey, we agree that the decision is one for the people of Scotland who live and work here.

The First Minister has made it clear that the Scottish Government is ready for those discussions. It is now up to the UK Government to come forward and respect the outcome of elections in this country.

Derek Bateman was a great journalist, a committed supporter of independence and a thoughtful commentator. In one article, he argued that

“Independence can't be portrayed as a knee-jerk response to limited freedoms and imposed restrictions.”

He said:

“The point about independence is that it is the creation of the people, not the lawyers. The people decide, the lawyers draft and the politicians legislate. It is a national *cri de coeur*”.

He was absolutely right.

The merits of independence are not for today. Independence gives us the chance to plot a different path. It rejects austerity, utilises our undeniable natural resources and the talents of our people, and makes our economy work for our people by tackling poverty.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member give way?

Neil Gray: I am concluding.

The merits of independence are not for today because today is not the day for us to decide. Today is about allowing the people of Scotland to take their democratic right to choose their own future. That used to be something that united us all. It is for the people to decide their own future.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Urgent Question

18:21

Amazon (Gourock)

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its urgent response is to the reported announcement regarding the closure of the Amazon Gourock site.

The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee): We are very disappointed to learn of the announcement today by Amazon to consult on closing its distribution centre in Gourock. I know that it will be a difficult time for the workforce, their families and people in the local area. Scottish Enterprise spoke with the company today to better understand the situation and the issues involved. I will meet Amazon tomorrow to discuss further and to understand better the decision that it has made and the impact on the facility at Gourock.

Neil Bibby: I welcome the fact that the minister is to meet Amazon tomorrow.

The news that Amazon is to end its 19-year association with Gourock, which will cost more than 300 jobs, is a hammer blow for Inverclyde and West Scotland. Those workers were the unsung heroes of the pandemic. Those employees face losing their jobs only a few weeks after making sure that the rest of us got our Christmas presents.

The Scottish Government is well aware of the challenges that face Inverclyde. It is a community that has lost major employers in the past, the consequences of which have been economic decline, deprivation and depopulation. What new steps will the Scottish Government take in response to the announcement, and how will the Scottish Government support Inverclyde Council's socioeconomic task force, of which the minister is a member, to minimise the impact of the decision and to attract new jobs to Inverclyde?

Ivan McKee: We will continue to work with everybody, wherever we can, to support further investment in Inverclyde and across the whole of Scotland.

Neil Bibby is right that I am a member of the Inverclyde task force. I attend that group and am keen to contribute and to work with others who have the interests of Inverclyde at heart, in order to attract as much investment as we can. He will be aware of the work that we are doing to support activity in the area through the Clyde mission, and of the work through the Glasgow city region deal, as well as the investments that we have managed to attract to Inverclyde over the years—and will

continue to attract—including the investment in Diodes. I was very proud to be involved in landing that deal to bring Diodes to Inverclyde.

Neil Bibby: I thank the minister for that answer and for his commitment to continuing to work with Inverclyde Council. I hope that we can leave no stone unturned.

We have, in the past, debated taxpayer support for Amazon. The company has been a welcome source of jobs for Inverclyde and other communities, but at some cost. There are concerns about its employment practices, the impact that it has had on our high streets and its tax bill being a fraction of its profits.

In the light of today's news, will the minister commit to publishing in full the extent of taxpayer support for the company, detailing the full commercial relationships that the Government has had with Amazon for provision of services to the public sector? Will he also tell us how the Scottish Government intends to engage with Amazon going forward? Finally, does he agree that at some point the state perhaps needs to treat Amazon with the same respect that it treats the people of Inverclyde and Scotland?

Ivan McKee: A total of £2,137,000 of financial support has been provided to Amazon in Gourock. The previous support that was given to the facility in Gourock stretched over the period from 2005 through to 2011.

Neil Bibby knows that we take fair work very seriously; it is a central tenet of our national strategy for economic transformation, and I am very keen to support it across all the sectors that I work with. The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training met Amazon in September 2021 and made those points and stressed the importance of fair work issues in his previous role as Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills.

In my most recent meeting with Amazon to consider how it could continue to invest in a wide range of activities in Scotland, I made it very clear to it that the centrality of fair work in our approach to economic development in Scotland is absolutely critical. We will leave no stone unturned in doing what we can to support the people of Inverclyde and the people who work at Amazon Gourock at this time. As always, we continue to look for more inward investment, and to stress the critical importance of fair work practices.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I speak in place of my Inverclyde colleague Stuart McMillan, whose mother sadly passed away this morning. Nevertheless, his staff and Ronnie Cowan MP met Amazon management this afternoon. Some of the 300-strong workforce are my constituents.

Amazon has claimed today that the Gourrock facility is one of the older sites and questioned its suitability and viability. Those concerns have never been raised directly with the local MSP or MP on past site visits. I am pleased that the minister will meet the company tomorrow. Will he facilitate talks between the landlord of the site and Amazon to see what improvements or investments can be made there to prevent closure and ensure that the Gourrock site continues to be a part of Amazon's future business plans?

Ivan McKee: I thank Kenneth Gibson for raising that issue. As I said, we will leave no stone unturned in trying to understand what is possible in order to save the Gourrock facility. If Kenneth Gibson, Stuart McMillan or any other member has information that would be helpful in that regard, I would be very keen to receive it before my meeting with Amazon tomorrow morning, or even following it.

If there are opportunities for further investment to be made to get the site to a position in which, in Amazon's view, it contributes to the company's operational footprint, I would be keen to explore them in whatever level of detail is required.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I convey my condolences to Stuart McMillan.

As a Greenock resident and someone who has been to the Amazon site, I know how much of a blow today's news will be to employees, their families and the entire community. Inverclyde is resilient and will survive any economic challenges that it faces, but Amazon is such a major local employer that closure would surely have a devastating impact.

Will the minister give serious consideration to setting up immediately a bespoke multi-agency task force that would bring together Amazon, the local authority, the Government and other public bodies, agencies and political parties to sit round the table and see what could be done in the immediate term to support the people of Inverclyde? There is precedent for that, as the minister knows, with Texas Instruments, and it would be a positive way to get everyone in the room together.

Ivan McKee: The member will be aware that an Inverclyde task force is already in operation. It is a fabulous initiative that was started locally. I and others were invited to be part of that group, and I am delighted to be able to work with it. That forum, which will meet again shortly in the next few weeks, is probably the best place to have the discussion about what can be done.

If that group decides that a subset of it is needed for detailed discussions, I would be happy to be part of that. However, I would prefer to work through the task force that is already in place,

rather than setting up a separate group at this stage. I think that the most effective way is to use the mechanisms that already exist to take matters forward.

Jamie Greene will, of course, be aware that Scottish Enterprise and the partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—initiative have engaged with the business to see what support can be offered to employees should the business decide, following consultation, to close the facility.

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I associate myself with the comments in the urgent question of my regional MSP colleague Neil Bibby. The impact of the Amazon closure on the local economy in Inverclyde cannot be overestimated, and it is a huge concern to local people.

As we have already heard, the issue raises broader concerns about how public money is used and, indeed, about Amazon failing in its moral obligations to provide safe, stable and well-remunerated employment to the people of Inverclyde.

I accept what the minister said about leaving no stone unturned in trying to protect a future for the site, but it is clear that Amazon is suggesting that people will be redeployed. That does not seem to be likely, so what discussions has the minister had with West College Scotland, Skills Development Scotland and others about retraining and reskilling people in Inverclyde to have well-paid and secure jobs?

Ivan McKee: As I have said, the financial support from the Scottish Government that went into the Amazon Gourrock site was over the period 2005 to 2011: that was the last support that was given to the site. As I have also said, I would be very happy to engage with anyone who can come forward with solutions, and to work together to facilitate support for the site in order to secure its future.

On skills and training, my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills is, of course, engaged in programmes throughout the country on an on-going basis to ensure that we upskill people—in Inverclyde and elsewhere—to take advantage of the many opportunities that are being created in all parts of Scotland across a range of sectors. As part of the discussions about the facility in question, I would be quite happy to engage with the local college and others, as required.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Amazon is a monumentally profitable company, and its founder, Jeff Bezos, is the definition of corporate greed. It is also infamous for hostility to its own workers when they try to organise through trade unions. Will the minister engage with unions

including the GMB, of which a number of the workers at the Gourrock site hold membership?

Ivan McKee: I would be very happy to engage with the GMB and to include it in discussions about how we will look for ways to find a secure future for the Amazon Gourrock site. I reiterate that our message to Amazon that we support the fair work agenda has been relentless and clear. That is absolutely central to our economic policies, as a Government. We always impress on Amazon the importance of that and raise any issues that are raised with us when it is not treating workers fairly across any of its sites, to ensure that it understands how important those issues are to the Scottish Government.

Proposed Domestic Building Environmental Standards (Scotland) Bill

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a statement by Patrick Harvie on the proposed domestic building environmental standards (Scotland) bill. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

18:33

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):

In what was a lively debate this afternoon, there were a number of calls for more constructive politics in the Parliament. I am therefore delighted that this short statement will give members the chance to welcome yet another example of the Government putting constructive politics into practice.

One of the critical areas in which Scotland needs to make more progress to reduce carbon emissions and to cut the cost of living is in improving the energy performance of our homes and buildings, cutting their overall energy use and ending our reliance on fossil fuel, which exposes everyone to volatile prices. That is why the Bute house agreement and the shared policy programme agreed between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party in August 2021 include commitments to decarbonise the heat that we use in new buildings from 2024 through the new-build heat standard, which we consulted on in 2021 and 2022. In announcing the latest changes to energy standards within the building regulations last June, I said that we need to raise standards and deliver the action and innovation that are needed to meet our objectives for a net zero Scotland.

The Bute house agreement also promises explicit support for Passivhaus and similar standards. As many members will know, Passivhaus is an example of a published design and construction standard that is proven to deliver buildings with very good energy and environmental performance.

Scotland should have been building highly energy-efficient homes for decades and, if we had done what some other northern European nations have done, our retrofit challenges now would be far more manageable. We have made progress, and we have good energy standards for new homes, but there is more that can be done and, in particular, lessons that can be applied from established standards such as Passivhaus.

In May last year, Alex Rowley lodged a proposal for a bill to set new minimum environmental design standards for all new-build housing to meet a Scottish equivalent of the Passivhaus standard. That proposal was welcome and was well aligned with the ambition that was set out in the Bute house agreement.

I met Mr Rowley in May and in November last year to discuss his proposal. On both occasions, it was clear that there was a shared ambition and recognition of the benefits that can be delivered from further review of our new-build energy standards. That means better energy and environmental standards for new homes and increased assurance that the design and construction of new buildings will deliver in practice the intended performance. We also discussed the Government's wider work on improving standards, including the most recent changes, which will apply from next month.

On 15 December last year, I wrote to Alex Rowley and to Parliament in response to his final bill proposal. I am pleased to confirm to Parliament that we will bring forward changes to building standards that will deliver a further step change in the energy performance of new buildings. As is required under rules 9.14.13 and 9.14.13A of standing orders, I confirm that the Scottish Government will make subordinate legislation within two years to introduce new minimum environmental design standards for all new-build housing to meet a Scottish equivalent of the Passivhaus standard, in order to improve energy efficiency and thermal performance. Our subordinate legislation will give effect to Mr Rowley's final proposal for a domestic building environmental standards (Scotland) bill.

Committing to a timetable for a further review enables us to set out the ambition in more detail in the spring and to continue to engage with the construction sector, which will build on initial discussions that started last year. Our initial work will determine how such a standard should be defined and delivered through the building standards system. It will draw from the experience of the Scottish construction sector to set out a challenging standard that is deliverable in practice at a national level.

I welcome the initial positive response from house builders to my recent announcement and their willingness to work with us. Over the coming months, we will welcome input from all corners of industry to assist in shaping proposals that can be further developed and put out to consultation next year.

I offer again my thanks for the work that Mr Rowley and his team undertook over the past year, which resulted in his final proposal and a greater awareness of the opportunities that such

standards can deliver. I am sure that that will be valuable work that helps with development of the review, and I welcome the continued involvement of Mr Rowley and his team in shaping the work.

As I noted in my letter, I look forward to continuing our programme of action to deliver improved energy and environmental standards across our new building stock and in particular to helping to deliver our vision to make all homes in Scotland warmer, greener and cheaper to run.

The Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow about 10 minutes for questions. Members who wish to ask a question should please press their request-to-speak button now.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to respond. I express my gratitude to the Scottish Government for its commitment to give effect to my proposed bill through Government legislation. I welcome the constructive dialogue that I have had with the minister. I thank the non-Government bills unit for the support that it has given my team and me in the past year of consultation; the Passivhaus Trust for providing invaluable guidance on the technicalities of the proposal; Unity Consulting for all its work in bringing the proposal together; and all the stakeholders who have kindly given us the benefit of their experience.

A lot of support came because of the importance that the proposed bill placed on the need for verification that a building meets the Passivhaus standards, which are to have no thermal bridging and to have superior windows, mechanical ventilation and heat recovery, high-quality insulation and airtight construction.

With that in mind, can the minister confirm that, in giving effect to my bill, the Scottish Government will not overlook the importance of a robust verification process for all new-build housing when implementing the Scottish equivalent to Passivhaus legislation, so as to ensure that the ambitious standards that are set are met, thereby giving confidence to new-build house owners across Scotland?

Patrick Harvie: I once again thank Alex Rowley. He talks about the constructive dialogue that there has been, and I once again put on record my thanks to him and his colleagues for taking that approach to this issue. I also thank the stakeholders who have contributed to his work and to the consultation that he has taken forward, the Passivhaus Trust and many others.

Alex Rowley is right to say that verification and ensuring compliance with new standards is an important aspect of improving energy performance through building standards. That has always been

the case. As we have seen an incremental improvement in building standards over the years, we have needed to ensure that there is also an improvement in verification and in compliance. I think that we now have a strong approach to a compliance plan. As we continue to develop the work of defining the new standard, that will be accompanied by work to ensure that there is no gap between what we are setting out on paper and what we are able to deliver in practice. The issue of verification is hugely important.

Once again, I look forward to continuing to have good dialogue with Alex Rowley and other colleagues across the chamber to ensure that that happens.

Alex Rowley: Verification is the key issue that people continue to stress.

Support from the building industry for the bill was very much there. However, it talked about the issues that it faced, such as access to required materials, geographical imbalance in that access and the need to ensure that there is a trained and skilled workforce.

Does the minister agree that, as well as passing legislation, the Government must ensure a joined-up approach to introducing those ambitious targets by ensuring that we tackle the difficulties in the Scottish supply chain and engage with the building industry to increase the number of people who gain the skills in the sector? Does he agree that that joined-up approach needs to be overseen and driven by Government?

Patrick Harvie: That is a hugely important aspect, and it is relevant to the whole of my heat in buildings portfolio. The Passivhaus concept and improvements to building standards are one important aspect of delivering this in new builds. However, if we are going to achieve what we need to on the wider heat in buildings side, the supply chain and the skills are absolutely critical.

We need to see that as an opportunity and not just a challenge. I believe that there is not just work to be done, but long-term, high-quality careers to be had in delivering the transformation in our built environment that we require, whether in insulating zero-emission heating systems, retrofitting existing buildings for energy efficiency or improving the way in which we deliver new-build housing.

I absolutely agree that the Government's work on the supply chain delivery plan for heat in buildings and other aspects of the work that we are doing to support skills in that area will be critical to the issue of Passivhaus-equivalent standards, but they will be equally critical to the rest of our heat in buildings agenda.

Alex Rowley: The response that we have had to this, as the minister has seen, has been absolutely overwhelming. It was certainly a greater response than I had expected. Interestingly, however, although there was real support for this, people continue to talk about and stress the need for retrofitting the current housing stock. Does the minister agree that we need to review the progress that has been made on retrofitting and look at how we can accelerate the efforts in that area to maximise household energy efficiency and tackle fuel poverty?

Patrick Harvie: We do need to continue what we are doing, which is carrying out our ambitious approach to accelerating the retrofit agenda as part of the wider heat in buildings programme.

I reinforce what I said in my opening remarks: the commitment to the Bute house agreement in August 2021, which included explicit support for Passivhaus, was part of a much wider set of policy priorities to accelerate Scotland's move towards zero-emission heating, high levels of energy efficiency and the heat in buildings agenda.

It has never been clearer than it has been over the past year or two that this is not just about reducing carbon emissions, critical though addressing the climate emergency is; it is also essential if we are to meet the cost of living challenge and remove the vulnerability that people are exposed to through high and volatile fossil fuel prices. The Passivhaus standard and improving the way in which we deliver new builds can teach us valuable lessons about how we can systematise some retrofit approaches, too.

We continue to do a huge amount to accelerate work in this area. I am grateful that we have the political support of a good number of members across the chamber, and I look forward to that continuing.

The Presiding Officer: Time is tight and interest is great. If we have short and succinct questions and responses, more members will be able to ask their questions.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I, too, pay tribute to Alex Rowley for his work on the bill and the important work that he has put in to get us to this point.

The Scottish Government's latest housing statistics have revealed that the number of housing completions across all tenures in Scotland is still way below pre-Covid levels. Therefore, I have two questions for the minister. First, how will the Scottish Government ensure that it is able to meet its housing targets, given the additional costs that the proposals might present to private developers and, more important, the social rented sector, with the additional costs that it faces? Secondly, given the additional costs for the

construction sector, what assessment have ministers made at this point of the higher cost per unit that the legislation is likely to lead to?

Patrick Harvie: The cost of living crisis is, of course, also a cost of doing business and cost of construction crisis. We know that, not just in Scotland but across Europe, the cost of delivering new buildings of any kind, including housing, has increased dramatically. The situation has been exacerbated in the UK as a result of some of the skills impacts of Brexit, and I know that we will continue to debate those issues long and hard.

I emphasise that the Scottish Government believes that the regulations that we will consult on later this year will set a long-term direction of travel and give the industry confidence that Scotland is serious about the heat in buildings transformation. We should see this as an opportunity for investment. Trying to muddle through, year to year, would be the wrong way to go. We need to give the construction sector the confidence that Scotland is serious about having a highly energy efficient, zero-carbon approach to our buildings. That will drive investment in skills and capacity. I hope that we will have the support of Conservative colleagues when we consult on the regulations.

Unlike the position 10 or 20 years ago, when the construction industry was telling us that we should not gold plate the building regulations, it is now saying that change is coming. The industry sees that a net zero future provides it and its members with an opportunity, so we need to work constructively with it.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Will the minister set out in more detail the ways in which giving effect to a Passivhaus-equivalent standard for new-build housing will help us with our fuel poverty targets and with the transition to net zero?

The Presiding Officer: In brief detail, minister.

Patrick Harvie: Our approach will involve working in a consultative way to develop and define the Passivhaus standard. We will listen to the industry and to views from members across the chamber. That will ensure not only that we define the standard in the best way, but, as I said earlier, that we close any gaps relating to compliance and that the intention on paper is achieved in practice. Passivhaus standards, as well as other aspects of the heat in buildings agenda, provide huge potential to cut not only emissions but people's cost of living. Frankly, there is no path to Scotland achieving our wider climate change targets without success on the heat in buildings agenda.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, pay tribute to Alex Rowley for his work on the

issue, and I hope that he will remain engaged on it.

The minister acknowledged that Passivhaus is an internationally recognised standard that is underpinned by 30 years of rigorous scientific development, with a robust system of independent certification and a track record of delivering ultra-low-energy houses across the world. I am therefore interested in the reason why the minister is not simply incorporating Passivhaus into building standards, which would at least have the benefit of helping with skills development and the professional support that will inevitably be needed.

Patrick Harvie: I take the point, but, as Liam McArthur mentioned, the Passivhaus standard is essentially owned and defined by an external body—it is not something that Government defines. As the Scottish Government is responsible for building standards, it is important for us to set our own definition.

Liam McArthur and other members who represent remote rural and island communities, which can face different climatic conditions or have housing stocks with different natures, will recognise that a new standard perhaps needs to be defined to take into account the particular circumstances in Scotland or in particular places within Scotland. Therefore, once again, I offer to Liam McArthur and other members the opportunity to engage with the Scottish Government as we take forward that work.

The Presiding Officer: We must conclude that item of business at this point.

Decision Time

18:50

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Donald Cameron is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sarah Boyack will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-07429.1, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07429, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the people's right to choose: respecting Scotland's democratic mandate, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a brief pause to allow members to access the digital voting system.

We will now proceed with the division on amendment S6M-07429.1. Members should cast their votes now.

Before I close the vote, I call Kaukab Stewart to cast a proxy vote on behalf of Stuart McMillan.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I cast that vote as a no.

The Presiding Officer: We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

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

White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-07429.1, in the name of Donald Cameron, is: For 30, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-07429.3, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07429, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the people's right to choose: respecting Scotland's democratic mandate, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

Before I close the vote, I call Kaukab Stewart to cast a proxy vote on behalf of Stuart McMillan.

Kaukab Stewart: I cast that vote as a no.

The Presiding Officer: We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-07429.3, in the name of Sarah Boyack, is: For 24, Against 100, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S6M-07429, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the people's right to choose: respecting Scotland's democratic mandate, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

Before I close the vote, I call Kaukab Stewart to cast a proxy vote on behalf of Stuart McMillan.

Kaukab Stewart: I cast that vote as a yes.

The Presiding Officer: We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

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

Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
 (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
 (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-07429, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the people’s right to choose: respecting Scotland’s democratic mandate, is: For 70, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges the decision of the UK Supreme Court in the reference by the Lord Advocate of devolution issues under paragraph 34 of schedule 6 to the Scotland Act 1998; reaffirms its belief that people in Scotland have the sovereign right to determine the form of government best suited to their needs; believes that the United Kingdom should be a voluntary association of nations and that it should be open to any of its parts to choose by democratic means to withdraw from the union, and calls on the UK Government to respect the right of people in Scotland to choose their constitutional future.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Shared Parenting

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business tonight is a members' business debate on motion S6M-06610, in the name of Fulton MacGregor, on a programme promoting the benefits of shared parenting. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes what it sees as the importance of the involvement of both parents when bringing up a child; asserts that every child of separated parents deserves the love and support of both of their parents; believes in the need for parents to co-operate where appropriate; understands that research has shown that there is a lack of support for children of separated parents; considers that parents, including in the Coatbridge and Chryston constituency, may need help to make important decisions about sharing the care of their children; acknowledges the view that there is a need for public policy to recognise these challenges; praises Shared Parenting Scotland for piloting the New Ways for Families programme; recognises that the online programme focuses on the key skills of emotion management, flexible thinking and behaviour moderation; applauds the ethos of the programme, which, it considers, puts children first, as well as focusing on improving co-parenting and making decisions together out of court; notes reports that a similar programme introduced in Canada saw a significant increase in parenting co-operation upon completion, and congratulates Shared Parenting Scotland for securing £16,500 worth of funding from the Scottish Government, The National Lottery, and an anonymous trust in order to deliver the programme.

19:00

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I am delighted to bring to the chamber this debate on shared parenting, in my capacity as convener of the cross-party group on shared parenting. I am pleased to see colleagues from all political parties here to support the debate. It has been another long day in the chamber, with business running on, so I appreciate people staying on for the debate.

The cross-party group's secretariat is provided by Shared Parenting Scotland, who I thank for its support to the group and to members in general. In particular, I thank John Forsyth, who is in the gallery, and his colleague Ian Maxwell. I also thank them for their support in the preparation of this speech.

Since 2010, Shared Parenting Scotland has supported well over 1,000 parents across the country in a number of ways, including by holding monthly local support meetings, authoring policy papers and other publications, and running a helpline.

As a concept, shared parenting is pretty straightforward. It is estimated that up to 30,000 parents in Scotland separate every year, and

research indicates that up to 33 per cent of Scottish children experience a family separation during their childhood. The idea of shared parenting is that the interests of the child are the most important consideration when separated parents are making parenting arrangements.

Although it has been observed that mothers have traditionally been more likely to be the main carers for their children post-separation, Shared Parenting Scotland notes that the number of fathers who provide equal amounts of care is increasing. The organisation helps same-sex couples who have separated, too.

A wealth of research supports the notion that a child's development is positively impacted if the separated parents are present during the child's upbringing. For example, the millennium cohort study—a longitudinal cohort study of about 19,000 children across the United Kingdom, which began at the turn of the century—has found that, for the children of separated parents, more contact with the non-resident parent was associated with better outcomes at age 11. Likewise, a recent study that Shared Parenting Scotland commissioned, which analysed the views and experiences of young people whose parents had separated at some point during their childhood, found that almost all contributors said that they would have liked to have seen the parent that they did not live with more often during their childhood.

All that backs up arguments that I made in debates about shared parental leave during the previous parliamentary session. I have long argued that we need to move away from the outdated notion that the mother should be the primary caregiver and the father the breadwinner—for want of a better term. Countries that have better shared parental leave policies tend to be happier, with more breaking down of gender barriers, particularly in the workplace.

Parental involvement in the early days can provide the groundwork for decisions that might need to be made about shared parenting at a later date. In essence, it stands to reason that the more involved both parents are at the earliest stage, the more likely it is that such involvement will be sustained, whatever the circumstances.

In short, when parents separate, it is in the best interests of the child that both parents remain present and involved during the child's development. However, I should stress that there will be times when shared parenting will not work for a family and might even be detrimental to the child; the approach should be encouraged only when it is appropriate.

The motion that I lodged asserts the need for separated parents to work together, if appropriate, for the benefit of their children. It highlights the

lack of support for people who want to engage in shared parenting and calls for public policy to remedy that.

With that in mind, I praise a pilot programme that Shared Parenting Scotland has launched: the New Ways for Families programme is the first of its kind to be introduced in Europe. At its core, it teaches and reinforces conflict resolution skills for parents who are going through separation or divorce. That is a key principle; the approach helps separated parents with conflict management, joint decision making, respectful communication and stress alleviation, thereby addressing issues that are often the cause of a breakdown in post-separation parenting arrangements.

The 12-module online course includes three one-to-one coaching sessions, which are delivered by experts in therapeutic, legal and mediation disciplines, all of whom have been trained by the High Conflict Institute. The programme is completed on the passing of a final examination, to ensure that participants have understood the content of the 12 modules.

I can stand here and praise the programme's goals and laud its introduction, but the most important question is whether it is effective. According to the most recent figures, just under 30 parents in Scotland have completed the course. Shared Parenting Scotland collected anonymous feedback from people who completed the course, which underlines how beneficial such a programme can be. One participant said:

"New Ways for Families benefits from being online, therefore giving a degree of flexibility to Co-Parents to complete their online modules when it best suits their lifestyles."

Another said:

"Really useful information. I expect I'll use what I've learned regularly as I progress through my parenting journey. Have learned some really helpful techniques and tips that will help me with what I'm going through."

Another said:

"My coach was beyond excellent, experienced, patient, knowledgeable. The sessions really changed how I relate to my ex-partner and his relationship with our child."

Similar programmes have been introduced in North America, with comparable levels of success. A Canadian version of the programme resulted in 75 per cent of parents maintaining and improving their joint making of major decisions for and overall involvement with their children. The programme also resulted in significant reductions in behavioural issues, stress and anxiety for the children of separated parents.

Shared Parenting Scotland will launch the New Ways for Families online training and coaching programme in spring this year for widespread use

across Scotland. One of my main reasons for bringing the debate to the chamber is to ensure that members are aware of that programme for their constituents.

The pilot programme was funded by the Scottish Government, the national lottery and a trust fund. It is hoped that further funding can be sourced to support the coming launch. Once the programme is established, it is projected that fees will cover the costs of providing the online training and coaching and of the associated administration. Shared Parenting Scotland has also expressed a desire to ensure that free or low-cost places will be offered to parents who are on benefits or a low income. I thank Shared Parenting Scotland for that commitment.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I congratulate Fulton MacGregor on bringing this debate. He will recall the work that we did during the previous session of Parliament, when I brought forward an amendment proposing a presumption of shared parenting. He is absolutely right about the benefits that are being seen internationally, as well as about the concerns that were expressed about the need always to put the rights of the child at the centre of any decision. Does he believe that the work of the pilot programme and the further international evidence mean that we are closer to being in a position where the presumption of shared parenting might be safely introduced in the Scottish context?

Fulton MacGregor: I am glad that the member has taken the opportunity to intervene, because he spoke to me earlier to say that, had it not been for other commitments, he would have been speaking in the debate. I know that he is a strong advocate of shared parenting. In answer to his question, I think that we are moving in the right direction, but that there is much more to do. I thank Liam McArthur for his work in this area.

I commend Shared Parenting Scotland for their initiative in developing, piloting and launching the programme, which complements other courses available in Scotland, such as the parenting apart sessions available through local family mediation organisations across the country. That three-hour group session is another resource that separated parents might consider using as they transition to living apart while remaining part of their children's lives.

When possible, shared parenting should be encouraged and supported. Adult relationships do not always work out as people might want, but the breakdown of a relationship should never mean that a child's wellbeing must suffer. A shared parenting approach can help to alleviate the stresses and anxieties that children face during a separation and is beneficial for parents, children and the wider family.

I again thank everyone here. I am grateful to everyone who will participate in the debate and look forward to hearing their speeches.

19:08

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I am sorry to see people leaving as I stand to speak, but there you go.

I thank Fulton MacGregor for bringing the debate to Parliament and for his important work as convener of the cross-party group on shared parenting.

I have followed the issues raised by Shared Parenting Scotland with some interest, because Glasgow has more lone-parent families than any other local authority area in the country; in Glasgow, four in 10 families are led by a lone parent and 91 per cent of children in those families are being raised only by their mother. That means that many children in Glasgow are growing up without a father figure in their lives.

Avoiding the unnecessary breakdown of relationships between parents and their children can be complex, especially when the relationship between the parents themselves has broken down. In those situations, it is helpful to have friends, family or support networks, such as neutral third-party organisations, in place to offer support. Often, the perspective of an outside organisation such as Shared Parenting Scotland can facilitate mediation or meetings in neutral areas, where a new way forward can be established.

That is incredibly important, as the impact of having no father or mother in the home can be devastating for children. I am sad to say that, in the UK, 76 per cent of children and young people in custody have been growing up in homes without a father. We know from the statistics that there are many other poor outcomes of parenting breakdown, such as emotional and behavioural problems, neglect, teen pregnancy, alcohol and substance abuse and poor school performance.

Programmes that end the cycle of the withdrawal of fathers, in particular, from their families—fathers are the majority of this group—are pivotal to improving outcomes for children. Wherever possible, joint parenting must be at the heart of shared parenting.

A unique initiative in America is working to combat generational cycles of fatherless homes and the criminalisation of children who grow up without a father. It is run by a Christian organisation, God Behind Bars, which works to reunite incarcerated parents with their children, so that relationships can be built and new memories created. One in four children in the USA is growing

up in a home without a father present—that is more than 18.4 million children. As in Scotland, such children are statistically more likely to live in poverty and to end up in prison. The statistics suggest that some 85 per cent of the children in the USA who have an incarcerated parent end up in prison themselves. The initiative to reunite families is aimed at combating that cycle.

At Christmas, the organisation runs the all is bright project. Mums and dads pick out and wrap five or so presents, which have been bought by volunteers, for each of their children. The incarcerated parent also gets a new outfit to wear that day, so that they do not have to wear prison clothes. They then enjoy an all-day Christmas celebration with the whole family, which involves a full Christmas meal, gingerbread house building and games for the children. The event provides lasting, positive memories for little boys and girls and gives their parents an environment in which they can build relationships with their children—it is an opportunity to start again. One dad said:

“Let me explain something to you. This is the true definition of what hope is. Look at all of what you see, what all these people give us. This is the only definition of hope that any of us need to see. For guys like us, who have been down for such a long time, this is it.”

That kind of work, which has at its heart the restoration and transformation of parenting, is tremendous in its ability to restore relationships and break the cycle of fatherless homes. I welcome such initiatives and the shared parenting model, which value the role of both parents. As we in the Parliament do more to support such change, I hope that we will begin to see an increasingly positive impact on social outcomes for children who are reunited with their fathers and mothers.

19:13

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to follow Bill Kidd, who gave an excellent speech in support of Fulton MacGregor’s motion.

Parenting is likely to be the most important role that many of us will ever have in our lives. I have no hesitation in supporting any effort or initiative, whether it is public or private, to maintain and strengthen the role of parents and the central place of the family as the fundamental unit of society.

It is a wonderful gift and blessing to be a parent and to be able to see one’s child grow, develop new skills and, ultimately, become self-sufficient, wherever that is possible. It fills the parent with no small measure of pride in their child—which is something that is actually quite difficult to explain.

Members should make no mistake: a child needs the loving example of their parents, as Bill Kidd said. No effort should be spared in

encouraging separated parents to work together for the good of their children. The enduring love of a family is like nothing else in all the world.

It is a huge responsibility to be a parent, and there is no formal training for what is one of the greatest roles that a person might ever be called on to play. In the first few years after a tiny helpless person, who depends wholly on their parent, enters one's life, one's mindset must be reframed around the child's needs. Make no mistake: that can sometimes feel overwhelming. I know that feeling; I think that every parent does.

For people who have more than one child, having the time and money to send them to all the activities that they become involved with, helping them with their school work, and giving them the love and support that they need, is a full-time job. Those responsibilities usually come at a point in life when time and money both feel like scarce resources. It is quite a job of co-ordination, so every parent who is honest with themselves will tell of times when they feel overwhelmed, when the pressure is on and it feels like there is nowhere to turn.

What can we, as parliamentarians, do to support parents in such situations? Do we remove responsibility? Do we transfer a child's upbringing to an agency or to a system that is determined by a faceless bureaucratic state, or do we empower parents—as we have been hearing, including by supporting separated parents—to fulfil the responsibilities that they have for their children to make them feel like the gift that they are? The answer is clear, as has been said by previous speakers: we must empower parents.

Every public policy and every piece of proposed legislation should be made to pass the test of family friendliness—we must ask whether it supports the family.

Children must never feel, when they are growing up, that they are a burden on their parents. If they do, they will likely experience issues with their personal confidence, which will impact on their relationships and the direction of their lives. Therefore, every effort that we make to support good parenting—which is highlighted in Fulton MacGregor's motion—is, to me, a solid gold social good.

Families in Scotland are gloriously diverse; every family is unique and has circumstances that are fashioned around the people who are in them.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I am enjoying Stephen Kerr's speech. He mentioned "good parenting". As a father of two, I know that there is no such thing as perfect parenting, and in the context of this debate, we should all accept that we are allowed to make mistakes and that parenting is not a black

and white issue. We can be the best parents that we seek to be, but there is no such thing as perfect parenting.

Stephen Kerr: I completely agree with Bob Doris—parenting is a work in progress. We learn all the time from our children—and, in my case, grandchildren—about how to be better parents and grandparents.

In principle, any statist attempt to categorise families or to homogenise families is at odds with the reality of family life in all its varieties. A Government that believes that the answer to everything is to increase its own powers is a Government that is in denial of the nature of the root causes of many of the problems that we face, as a society. When more government is the answer, it is always worth looking to see whether it was the Government that caused the problem in the first place.

We must recognise that a one-size-fits-all out-of-the-box solution, such as the state often reaches for, rarely works. We must not always reach for the power of the state as if it were the only response available to us, because it is not—as is illustrated by the motion. That is why the Scottish Conservatives reject the idea of the state empowering itself at the expense of parents. That is not an ideological position; it is one that acknowledges that love is the key ingredient in all our lives, especially the lives of children. Ideally, love is added through a family, and the family is best supported when the state works to enable parents and lets families live their lives and pursue happiness in their own way.

19:18

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I congratulate Fulton MacGregor on securing the debate. I also acknowledge the work of Shared Parenting Scotland, which helps parents to work together despite their differences, to share the care of and responsibility for their children, and to provide them with the stability that they require.

It is inevitable that children will face difficulty when their parents part, and there can be a great deal of animosity between parents when a relationship breaks down. The children can feel that they are being pulled in different directions because of that. Therefore, sensitive handling can ease their distress and reassure young people. It is, therefore, important to support parents to make the right decisions for their children and to reach amicable solutions that put their children first. We see cases in which parents put aside their personal hurt and anger in order to ensure that the children's relationship with the other parent continues.

We also need services that recognise the importance of shared parenting—for example, in relation to access to housing. Both parents need access to adequate housing in order to provide a home for their children. Too often, when they share parenting, we see the mother being given access to adequate housing, while the father is not housed adequately to allow the children to come to live with them.

In the majority of cases, the best outcome for the child is that both parents are involved in the child's life and future. However, there are exceptions. It is clear that abusive parents, for example, should not have an automatic right of access to their children. Far too often, family courts are used by one parent to continue to perpetrate domestic abuse of the other parent. I have many cases in which abusive fathers use access to their children to identify where the mother is living in order to continue physical abuse. That is absolutely unacceptable—and neither is it acceptable to place the onus on the child to keep that information secret.

I also have constituency cases in which abusive fathers use the system to continue to exercise control—even when no physical abuse is involved—by making arrangements to see the child only to cancel at the last minute when they become aware that their ex-partner will be doing something else while they have the child. In such cases, they cancel the arrangement or return the child early in order to scupper those plans and to exercise continuing control over their ex-partner.

Parents who use their children as weapons should not have access to them, and parents should also not have access to their children when they cause damage and there is an abusive relationship. We know that the life chances of children who are brought up in abusive households are severely impacted. It has an impact on their ability to learn and on their self-esteem, which goes on to impact other significant aspects of their lives. Such problems are a direct result of domestic abuse. Abusive parents should not have access to their children until they can prove that they are no longer abusive and that the wellbeing of their children will come first. I hope that the minister will address those concerns and advise how she will prevent abusive parents from continuing to damage the lives of young people even when the relationship has broken up.

I would like a system in which such parents go through a process of training and acknowledgement of their wrongdoing in order to ensure that they no longer continue to perpetrate abuse. They should have to complete that process before getting access to their child. In that way, we would protect young people.

For far too long, I have been seeing in my casework the impact of domestic abuse on families, and how children are abused and used in such situations. We should not allow that to happen, so I look forward to the day when family courts no longer allow themselves to be used as a weapon in domestic abuse cases.

19:22

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I am happy to speak in this members' business debate on an important topic that deserves more consideration than it often gets, so I thank Fulton MacGregor for securing time for the debate. It has been my pleasure to sit on the cross-party group on shared parenting, and I look forward to continuing the important discussions that take place in that forum.

I whole-heartedly agree with what Rhoda Grant said, and I hope that the minister will address the comments that she made a few moments ago.

All children deserve to be brought up in a safe, loving and supportive environment, regardless of who they are and where they come from. Without that, their opportunities in life can be severely limited. As my good friend Stephen Kerr said, parenting is a great gift. From personal experience, I can say that children can bring a lot of joy into a home—that has certainly been my experience with my twin girls. However, it is also a huge responsibility that requires us to put others before ourselves and to make sacrifices for their sake. We often have to put our child's best interests before our own comfort or preferences, and that extends to life after family breakdown or the separation of parents.

A substantial body of research now underlines the benefits of shared parenting for children whose parents no longer live together. Outcomes are significantly better for children who have regular contact with both parents, including the one who no longer lives in the home. We are lawmakers, so we should do everything we can to provide incentives for parents to work together for the benefit of their child.

We must support all efforts to support shared parenting, be they from government or third sector organisations, to ensure that children are being brought up in the best environment possible. That is why I am pleased to support the motion and praise Shared Parenting Scotland for piloting the New Ways for Families programme, which endeavours to give parents the skill set that is needed to manage their shared parenting responsibilities. Those are valuable skills, such as emotion management and behaviour to cool things down, help dialogue between parents and aid in the making of decisions outside a court.

I know from personal experience of being a solicitor and being brought up by a father who did family law all his life that court is the last place one wants to go to to decide on parenting matters and who gets parenting rights.

I am pleased that a number of constituents have contacted me after having had first-hand experience of the programme, and they have been very complimentary of the service. They told me that it has helped them to deal with situations without letting emotions run high, in addition to teaching them the benefits of healing themselves. They describe the coaches as compassionate, brutally honest and attentive.

I thank Shared Parenting Scotland again for the positive difference that it has made to the lives of my constituents and others across Scotland, and I wish it continued success in the future. Ensuring that children receive the support and nurture that they require and deserve should be a fundamental priority for the Parliament, and I hope that we can continue to support Shared Parenting Scotland's valuable work.

19:26

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Presiding Officer, thank you for affording me the right to make this speech. I had not intended to speak, but this is a high-quality debate and I wanted to play my part in the discussion.

I congratulate Fulton MacGregor, who has been a committed champion of shared parenting issues in his time in the Parliament. I commend Fulton on that work.

I welcome the positivity and dedication of Shared Parenting Scotland to engage with the legislative process in this place constructively and positively, and to engage openly about how to nurture and develop a child's relationship with both parents when the relationship between the parents has broken down—that is vitally important.

As MSPs, we often hear about parenting issues only when things go badly wrong. Rhoda Grant alluded to that in her speech. We will have heard examples of controlling and coercive behaviour, domestic abuse and courts being used as a tool and a lever of power and control in the embers of a dying relationship between parents.

I know from my experience that some contact centres have not been of the required standard. I am pleased that they will now be regulated by the Scottish Government, and that those in contact centres who prepare reports that go to family courts will now have the skill set that they should always have had so that they can make informed decisions in relation to child care orders. I am

pleased to work in partnership with the Government on that.

We should say clearly that, in all the examples that I just gave, it is predominantly—although not always—men who have engaged in controlling and coercive behaviour, carried out domestic abuse and abused the court system. However, we cannot demonise men. Most dads are great dads and good fathers, and they want to be better dads and fathers. We have to make sure that the structures that we have in society are there for dads as well as mums. However, I should say that all the negative issues that we have talked about predominantly impact women. I would not be doing my job properly, as a constituency MSP, if I did not put that on the record.

Positive parenting before and after a spousal relationship breakdown is vital. Even if mum and dad were doing a great job of bringing up their children before the relationship breakdown, that is a difficult job, as we have heard, and it is made even more difficult after that relationship breakdown. There needs to be positive parenting before and after a relationship breakdown.

The New Ways for Families programme sounds like an innovative approach to dealing with the situation after a relationship breakdown, and I wish it every success. Fulton MacGregor put some of its successes on the record, and I look forward to hearing more about it.

Fulton MacGregor: I was reluctant to intervene, because it is quite an awkward situation in which to make an intervention.

Does the member agree that part of the issue that we are talking about comes back to my point that it is a societal issue in that, with parental leave, there is an expectation that mothers will do the main caring and, similarly, when people separate, there is an expectation that the mother will do all the caring? That is a barrier to gender equality. Does the member agree that we need a societal and cultural change in that regard? I agree with Stephen Kerr's point that it should not all be about Governments intervening.

Bob Doris: I agree absolutely with Fulton MacGregor on that point. In that sense, maybe it is an equalities issue. That is why we must ensure that dads are performing a shared parenting role while they are still in the relationship. One of the issues that we have in society is dads not pulling their weight in the relationship prior to its breaking down. We can understand the indignation of some mums when dads then demand rights that they were not exercising before the relationship broke down. That leads to tensions. Taking out those tensions through the New Ways for Families programme is an innovative way of dealing with some of that.

I want to talk briefly about how we ensure that we empower dads, irrespective of whether there has been a breakdown in the relationship. We know about the work that Dads Rock does—it has been a good friend of the Parliament—and Home-Start Glasgow North and North Lanarkshire in my constituency has a dads group. I am reminded of the fact that dads sometimes feel alienated from antenatal classes in the NHS. My wife and I were lucky enough to be able to pay for a National Childbirth Trust two-day class in a small group. That is a high-quality interactive experience that enables prospective parents to consider what shared parenting looks like for mum and dad. Maybe that is the kind of thing that all parents should be aware of when they are starting a family, rather than waiting to talk about shared parenting when relationships break down, as they inevitably do in some circumstances.

Shared Parenting Scotland is doing some really innovative work. I am pleased that Fulton MacGregor has brought the issue of the benefits of shared parenting to the chamber for debate. When the minister sums up the debate, I would like to hear more about the positive work that we can do before relationships go wrong, because that will empower people to do the right thing once relationships fragment.

19:32

The Minister for Community Safety (Elena Whitham): I congratulate Fulton MacGregor on securing this important debate, which gives me my first chance as a minister to respond to a debate. What a wonderful debate to do that in.

The debate has looked at fresh perspectives and initiatives on an area that can often be difficult and challenging: how to bring up children when separating parents do not agree. The debate has raised a number of issues about parents who separate, including support for the children involved and support for the parents. It is in our collective best interests that the rights of children are seen as paramount. Those rights are hugely important when parents separate.

The Scottish Government is pleased to work with Shared Parenting Scotland, members of which I welcome to the gallery. In this financial year, we have provided financial support to the organisation from the children and families portfolio and the justice portfolio. In 2022-23, we have provided a total of £77,574 of financial support for Shared Parenting Scotland. That includes some money for supporting the New Ways for Families programme that is mentioned in the motion.

Following my recent appointment as the Minister for Community Safety, I will meet Shared

Parenting Scotland on 2 February to learn more about its work and future plans. I am already aware of the valuable work that the organisation carries out through its helpline, its publications, its training, its group meetings and its WhatsApp groups, which are fantastic in enabling parents to access support at any time they need it. All that work supports separating parents through what is a stressful, emotional and difficult time. Research published by the Scottish Government notes the stress that separating parents go through, and the stress and trauma that are experienced by parents who go through that situation are regularly raised in the correspondence that we receive from parents.

That stress and trauma can, of course, impact on how the parents speak to their children about what is happening. In any disputes or disagreements between separating parents on how to bring up their children, the welfare of the children must be paramount. That underlying principle is the key principle in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. We need to follow that principle when disputes or disagreements between separating parents about bringing up their children are resolved outside of courts as well as when they are resolved within the court system.

The research carried out by Jamie Wark, who is a Robertson scholar, which is mentioned in the motion, raises the issue of how best to support children when parents separate, and I congratulate him on carrying out that research and raising that very important point.

The research shows that the separation of parents can have a direct impact on an individual's perception of relationships and their own life, so, as we have heard from members this evening, there can be longer-lasting, generational impacts. The Scottish Government has recognised that having separated parents can be one of the adverse childhood experiences that we talk about. Jamie Wark's research shows that children might not always have enough support and advice when their parents are separating.

In his eloquent speech, Bill Kidd outlined how that trauma can have lasting effects. When we think about parents who are apart—especially when incarceration is involved—we need to remember the generational impact that that can have.

The Scottish Government plans to consult in 2023 on how best to implement the provisions of the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 on child advocacy services, and we will include in that consultation some discussion on how best to support children when parents separate while recognising that parents, along with other trusted family members, will always be the key source of

information for their children. That speaks to some of what Stephen Kerr and others have mentioned.

Of course, we need to make it as easy as possible for parents to communicate with their children, and one of the aims of the New Ways for Families project, which Fulton MacGregor mentioned in his motion and others have referred to, is to make family separation less traumatic and stressful for parents and their children. The project aims to provide enhanced skills in a range of areas such as managing emotions, flexible thinking, modelling behaviour and developing empathy and respect, in order to provide parents with the skills and insights to provide solutions and to put their children first, which is not always easy at a time when resilience is low and positions can become entrenched. As Stephen Kerr rightly pointed out, as parents, we do not get a manual when our children are born, but this project helps to equip parents in this greatest of endeavours. Further, those important skills can transfer into lots of other areas in people's lives, too.

As Fulton MacGregor mentioned, the evaluation in North America has shown positive results for the New Ways for Families project, and I am aware that initial feedback from parents who have gone through the pilot in Scotland has also been positive. Some of those experiences were brought to life by Jeremy Balfour, who talked about his constituent, and Fulton MacGregor, who quoted some of those parents. Clearly, the full evaluation of the Scottish pilot is crucial to enable funders and Shared Parenting Scotland to consider next steps in this area, and I welcome Shared Parenting Scotland's commitment to evaluate the pilot, and look forward to hearing its final results. It will be interesting to see whether the pilot merits the positives that we have heard from the evaluation of the project in Medicine Hat in Canada in terms of the reduction in children's experiences of stress and anxiety, which result in stomach aches, headaches and episodes of acting out. I am keen to see that evaluation.

The Scottish Government will continue to work with Shared Parenting Scotland, Scottish Women's Aid, children's organisations and others to improve our family justice system and, where possible, to encourage resolution of disputes outside of court.

I was struck by Rhoda Grant's speech for a number of reasons, one of which concerned the surrounding housing issues. That took me back to 2005, when I was practically supporting my ex-husband to remain in secure housing, as we had agreed to fully share the parenting of our son. A lot of people do not recognise that such arrangements are for the benefit of the children—at the time, a lot of people thought that it was a bit strange that I was doing that.

We want to build consensus in this Parliament and among key stakeholders about how to support parents and children during separation and about how disputes should be dealt with. There may well be differing views and perspectives, but there will also always be common ground in relation to matters such as welfare of children and the reduction of stress and trauma. It is also important to emphasise that we will always support both parents to be fully involved in a child's life, where that is safe—as a former women's aid worker, I am pleased that Shared Parenting Scotland's approach recognises that, where a history of domestic abuse is at play, that must be fully considered, and contact should not be used to further and continue abuse at any point in the process. I take on board the concerns that Rhoda Grant and Bob Doris expressed in that regard, and I will continue to ensure that that issue is at the forefront of our considerations.

The motion and this debate raise some interesting questions and, importantly, we have debated some solutions, too. I look forward to seeing the evaluation of the New Ways for Parenting pilot and I assure the chamber that we will discuss with Shared Parenting Scotland the outcomes of the evaluation and its thoughts on how best to take forward the project in Scotland.

Across all sectors and portfolios, we must consider how we look at society as a whole, and think about how families can be supported to ensure that children thrive in an environment in which everyone has their welfare at heart.

Meeting closed at 19:39.

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