



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

Wednesday 7 June 2023

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 7 June 2023

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

## Business Motion

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is consideration of a business motion.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer. I very rarely make a point of order, but I feel that it is important to make one on this occasion to ensure that the answers that are provided by ministers to the Parliament are accurate and reflect reality. During yesterday's topical question time, in response to my supplementary question, the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity stated:

"I also remind the member that barcodes are not part of the regulations passed by the Scottish Parliament and are therefore not part of the legislation that we can consider here."—[*Official Report*, 6 June 2023, c 8.]

However, the Deposit and Return Scheme for Scotland Regulations 2020, which were passed by the Parliament, require European article numbers or barcodes to be included in any application for producer registration, as set out in schedule 1 of the regulations. I would be grateful if the Presiding Officer would confirm whether there has been any attempt by the minister to correct the *Official Report* on that point.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** As members have been reminded on numerous occasions, there are appropriate mechanisms for amending the record, and it is up to members whether they choose to avail themselves of those mechanisms.

We will proceed with the first item of business, which is portfolio question time.

Apologies—the Minister for Cabinet and Parliamentary Business has to move a business motion first. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motion S6M-09390.

**The Minister for Cabinet and Parliamentary Business (George Adam):** Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer. I thought that I had come down to the chamber for no reason.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I think that you will find that constitution portfolio questions are well worth the trip down from the ministerial office. [Laughter.]

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to

the programme of business for Wednesday 7 June 2023—  
after

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Constitution, External Affairs and  
Culture;  
Justice and Home Affairs

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Deposit Return  
Scheme

delete

5.10 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.40 pm Decision Time—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Portfolio Question Time

### Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

14:02

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** We can now move on to the long-anticipated portfolio questions on constitution, external affairs and culture.

#### Pakistan (Flooding)

1. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to Pakistan, following the severe flooding that the country experienced in 2022. (S6O-02324)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie):** The Scottish Government has provided £1.5 million in support to the people of Pakistan following the devastating floods in 2022. We have awarded £1 million in humanitarian support to the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal and members of our humanitarian emergency fund—HEF—panel, which is helping to deliver relief on the ground in Pakistan.

We have provided an additional £500,000 for our existing British Council Pakistan women and girls scholarships programme to double the number of school and university scholarships that are available to women and girls in the worst affected areas, ensuring that they can continue their education with minimal disruption.

**Sarah Boyack:** I put on record my support for all those who are still involved in the aftermath and who are supporting communities to recover, such as the Disasters Emergency Committee.

The minister mentioned direct funding to Pakistan, and the Government is also committed to increasing its international development fund to £15 million each year, but stakeholders have told me that they are unsure how the money will actually be used by the Scottish Government. Will the minister outline what work the Scottish Government is doing with the international development sector in Scotland to ensure that the increase in the fund will be used in country and in community? Will she also outline how the increase will help communities in Pakistan to recover from the extreme weather disruption and what it will do for other countries that are affected, the number of which will only increase due to the climate emergency? How will it help not just to get them back to where they were but to build in resilience against future climate disasters?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I make the usual reminder that questions must be brief and ministerial responses must be as brief as possible, to allow everybody to get their question in.

**Christina McKelvie:** Those are really important questions. We have seen the impact of flooding across Malawi and the impact of climate change. During the past few weeks, I have been discussing with officials the work that we need to undertake. I met members of the HEF and others during the past few weeks. I am keen to come back to Sarah Boyack with an update on what we are doing with the fund and the criteria for using it and to answer the questions about how it will be used.

#### Culture and Heritage (Community Facilities)

2. **Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting community-based facilities in the West Scotland region to preserve Scottish culture and heritage. (S6O-02325)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie):** The Scottish Government supports a range of organisations that help to preserve our culture and heritage in communities across Scotland.

We provide targeted support for culture and heritage facilities through our funding to local authorities, organisations and public bodies, including Creative Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland. In 2022-23, Creative Scotland invested £85.4 million in the West Scotland region.

Our Culture Collective programme brings together creative practitioners, organisations and—importantly—communities across Scotland to work together to shape the future cultural life of their communities. In West Scotland, Culture Collective supports programmes including Inverclyde Culture Collective, Evolve and Ayr Gaiety.

**Pam Gosal:** As gateways to knowledge and culture, libraries play a vital role in our society. However, under the Scottish National Party Government, they are—sadly—declining. In 2009-10, 65 full-time staff were employed in libraries in East Dunbartonshire. However, in 2022-23, there were just 38 full-time staff. Local councils are having to plug budget gaps that have been created by the SNP Government cuts. What more will the Scottish Government do to keep our libraries open and to ensure that knowledge and cultural heritage are preserved?

**Christina McKelvie:** Pam Gosal makes an excellent point about how important libraries are. They are so important that the responsibility for them is devolved to local authorities, and it is the

responsibility of local authorities to take that work forward. Of course, we know about the wellbeing, health and education impact of local libraries, and we have been working closely with the sector to ensure that we can maintain libraries, too.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** The minister will be well aware of many community organisations that are trying to save Scotland's built heritage that is at risk. A good example is an organisation called the Springburn Winter Gardens Trust, of which I am the chair. The trust is trying to save Scotland's largest Victorian glasshouse, which is in an increasingly perilous state of dereliction and has been abandoned since 1983.

We have been really struggling to try to achieve the necessary capital funds to initiate works to save the building. Would the minister be willing to meet me and the trustees to see whether we can find a viable way to save this historic building, which is in one of Scotland's poorest communities?

**Christina McKelvie:** I know the winter gardens well, having spent a lot of time in that park with my cousins when I was growing up, so I am well aware of the building.

Historic Environment Scotland's heritage and place programme is an area-based funding programme that aims to contribute to the development of vibrant, sustainable places in Scotland through community-led regeneration—exactly what Paul Sweeney is speaking about. I would be happy to meet Paul Sweeney and the organisation, because we have a number of ways in which we can support communities to ensure that they maintain and sustain heritage and keep it for the future.

### Scottish Opera (Orchestra)

**3. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the reported comments by Scottish Opera, regarding the disbanding of an orchestra due to the lack of young people in the industry. (S6O-02326)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie):** We know that participating in cultural activity from a young age boosts our wellbeing and helps us to develop valuable life skills.

The Scottish Government provides significant funding to support access to music and the arts for young people across Scotland. That includes the provision of £9.5 million in this financial year for the youth music initiative, which was announced just recently by my colleague Angus Robertson.

I understand that the orchestra that formed part of the Scottish Opera young company was

disbanded about five years ago. However, the Scottish Opera young company is still going strong and is supported by Scottish Opera's main orchestra.

**Finlay Carson:** Despite the Scottish National Party's commitment in 2021-22 to remove fees for all pupils learning a musical instrument, data now shows that 92 per cent of pupils are missing out. Specifically in my constituency and in Dumfries and Galloway, the number of pupils learning a musical instrument has declined by almost 500; in at least one school in the constituency, music is no longer being offered as an in-school subject, despite pupil demand. Will the minister explain how the SNP intends to keep its manifesto promise to remove barriers to music education and to ensure that all Scottish pupils have access to it?

**Christina McKelvie:** I am happy to work across the board with any organisations, including our local authorities, to look at more ways in which we can ensure that our young people get access to music tuition and all that comes with it. That is why investment in the youth music initiative is incredibly important. That investment is delivering on our commitment to expand our support to other art forms—it covers art forms other than music—and it ensures that the youth music initiative is used well by local authorities.

We need to ensure that the investment is targeted in a way that supports children and young people's health, wellbeing and personal development through the arts and their creative activity. I am happy to work with any local authority or organisation that is working on that. Recently, I met the chair of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' wellbeing board to reinstate the work of the culture chairs committee. We will be meeting soon, so I will raise the matter there.

**Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** Instrumental music tuition has been drastically reduced by some councils so that they can keep up with budget cuts, which means that thousands of children in Scotland might not have the opportunity to learn how to play a musical instrument at school. What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the impact of that on the ability of the industry to continue to recruit young musicians?

**Christina McKelvie:** The organisations that recruit young musicians into all the different aspects of the industry are working hard to keep doing that, which is why the investment in the youth music initiative is so important.

I would be happy to work with any member from across the chamber. This does not need to be a political issue; rather, it should be about how we ensure that our children get the best out of their

education. The investment in the initiative is important, and it would be great if the Opposition would welcome it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 4 has been withdrawn.

### Local Theatres

**5. Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting local theatres. (S6O-02328)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie):** The Scottish Government values the importance of the arts and local theatres for the many benefits that they can bring, such as nurturing creativity and improving health and wellbeing. The Scottish Government provides support to local theatres through funding to Creative Scotland for its regularly funded organisations, which include world-class theatres. Independent local theatres in Scotland are also eligible to apply to Creative Scotland’s open fund for specific projects or productions. I would urge them to do so.

**Paul O’Kane:** This year, the Beacon Arts Centre in Greenock celebrates its 10th birthday, which is a significant achievement that reflects its status as a much loved cultural institution. It is a continuation of the arts guild in Greenock, which was founded in 1946, and is much loved by people in Inverclyde and across my West Scotland region. Unfortunately, the centre is often seen as the exception rather than the rule, with too many community theatres struggling for survival due to inadequate financial support. The former finance secretary’s decision to reverse a proposed £6.6 million cut to the culture sector in February was a welcome step, but Creative Scotland should not have been threatened with such a significant financial cut in the first instance. Does the minister agree that cultural institutions such as the Beacon Arts Centre in Greenock are invaluable local assets? Will she agree to meet with me to discuss funding for various theatres in West Scotland that are in real peril?

**Christina McKelvie:** My answer will be quick: yes and yes.

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** The minister might be aware of West Lothian Leisure’s proposal to close the Howden Park Centre and theatre in Livingston, West Lothian, after Labour-led and Conservative-supported West Lothian Council’s proposal to withdraw all management fee funding from the trust in future years. What more can the Scottish Government do to ensure that local authorities are meeting their statutory responsibility under the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982 to provide cultural

facilities? Surely, simply owning buildings is not enough. Communities need a local cultural strategy and at least some financial contribution to the running of cultural services.

**Christina McKelvie:** I understand the concerns that have been raised about the future of the Howden Park Centre, although local authority provision is entirely a matter for each local authority.

I understand that Creative Scotland is initiating discussions with West Lothian Council about the potential closure of the centre in view of the redevelopment grant that was previously given to it. The additional Covid-related funding that was provided by the Scottish Government to West Lothian Council included £4.2 million in recognition of the loss of income during the pandemic by leisure centres such as the Howden Park Centre.

More broadly, we continue to work in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the culture conveners group—a forum that was instigated by Fiona Hyslop—at both local and national levels in order to identify ways to strengthen services around the principle of cultural recovery and renewal.

### Creative Scotland Funding (Highlands and Islands)

**6. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what percentage of Creative Scotland’s total awards funding was allocated to the Highlands and Islands in the last financial year. (S6O-02329)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** Creative Scotland provides a range of support for cultural activities and organisations across all regions of Scotland through its network of regularly funded organisations, the open fund and its various other funding streams. In the financial year 2022-23, 8.7 per cent of Creative Scotland’s total funding awards were allocated to projects in the Highlands and Islands.

**Edward Mountain:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, although, given the size of the area involved, I would have hoped for more.

Eden Court theatre is a valuable asset to the community of the Highlands. Through its participation in the Warm Welcome Campaign and the introduction of low-income tickets, the venue has supported residents through the global cost of living crisis. However, like many other Scottish theatre venues, Eden Court continues to face significant funding challenges. Will the cabinet secretary agree to look at what further funds could be made available to the theatre in these difficult times?



**Angus Robertson:** The Eden Court theatre in Inverness is the largest arts venue in the Highlands. It includes two theatres, two multi-purpose studios, two cinemas and three art galleries. That underscores its importance, which Edward Mountain rightly raises in the chamber. Eden Court receives regular funding from Creative Scotland of £500,000 a year. It also received support as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, including £242,000 in recovery funding.

It is also worth mentioning that the Eden Court youth theatre provides dance and theatre classes to young children aged five to eight years and invites schools across Scotland to theatre workshops. It is well known for its work right across the Highlands and Islands, not just in Inverness.

I totally agree with Edward Mountain about the importance of the Eden Court theatre and of the support that the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland give it, and I hope that that continues long into the future.

### Peace Institute

**7. Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its progress in establishing a peace institute by the end of 2022, as set out in its 2021-22 programme for government. (S6O-02330)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** Last year, the Scottish Government commissioned an independent report to advise on the establishment of a peace institute. Scottish ministers have endorsed the report's proposed path to establishing a fully fledged peace institute, and the Scottish Government remains committed to that ambition.

However, since the report's release, in June 2022, the financial situation that Scotland and the Scottish Government face has deteriorated and is the most challenging since devolution. In difficult economic times, difficult decisions require to be made, and ministers have reluctantly agreed to delay further work on the peace institute until later in this parliamentary term.

**Mercedes Villalba:** The Scottish Government's commitment to establishing the peace institute was that it would have a focus on human rights, yet Scotland's police force, Police Scotland, signed a training agreement with Colombia in 2020. Colombian police subsequently killed more than 40 people during protests in 2021 and detained hundreds of young people on spurious charges—many of them remain in prison.

Can the cabinet secretary confirm what discussions he has had with Scottish Government

ministers to ensure that the peace institute's focus on human rights is not undermined by Police Scotland's international development unit working with police forces that have a record of human rights abuses?

**Angus Robertson:** I think that I am right in saying that this is not the first time that the member has raised this issue in the chamber. It is absolutely right and proper that we look at the maintenance of the highest possible standards of human rights where any Scottish public institution is involved. It is also right to say that it is important, when practicable, that efforts are made to help and support the changing of cultures in other parts of the world that do not maintain the high standards of human rights that we enjoy in this country. However, I will reflect on what the member says and undertake to write back to her.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** Can the cabinet secretary reflect on the success of the Scottish Council on Global Affairs, which has fulfilled the programme for government pledge to co-ordinate Scottish expertise and research on global issues and their impact on Scotland?

**Angus Robertson:** Since its launch, last year, the Scottish Council on Global Affairs has made excellent progress in establishing itself as a crucial and impartial Scotland-based research institute providing a hub for informed, non-partisan debate on a wide range of global issues. The three founding universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews have made significant progress in harnessing the breadth of expertise that Scotland-based researchers have to offer. I am glad to see that the institute benefits from support not only from the Scottish Government but from the United Kingdom Government and across the political spectrum. Through its research programme and suite of regular events, it has begun to foster vital public discussion around key global issues of relevance to Scotland, and I am excited to see the plans that it has for the future.

**Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con):** I have previously, on three separate occasions, asked about the location, cost and treatment of the proposed peace institute, but no answers have been provided regarding those specific points. Will the cabinet secretary use this opportunity to share how much money has been spent so far, the projected cost and the number of civil servants who are involved?

**Angus Robertson:** Yes, I will be happy to do so.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I am surprised that that manifesto commitment has been dispensed with. We have the war in Ukraine and conflicts in Sudan and Yemen. If Scotland is

going to make a big impact on the world in resolving conflicts, why does the Government not prioritise that?

**Angus Robertson:** It is a priority for the Government during this parliamentary term, but I am happy to extend to Willie Rennie the commitment that I have given to write to Sharon Dowey on that subject. I think that he understands the financial constraints that the Scottish Government is working under and knows the commitment that the Government has to supporting peace and reconciliation efforts around the world. I am confident that we will make progress on that during this parliamentary session, and I look forward to the support of all parties for that initiative, which there has been for the Scottish Council on Global Affairs.

### Historic Environment Scotland (Reopening of Sites)

**8. Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to accelerate the reopening of any sites that are currently closed due to inspections by Historic Environment Scotland. (S6O-02331)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie):** We are providing Historic Environment Scotland with £72.7 million this year—a record high level of funding—to help maintain Scotland’s heritage and historic environment. That is an 82.6 per cent increase on pre-pandemic funding. With its commercial income, Historic Environment Scotland’s operating budget this financial year is £114.5 million, which is 22.4 per cent higher than it was pre-pandemic.

Historic Environment Scotland has completed on schedule the first group of inspections in its prioritised inspection programme, and it is making progress on the inspection of the next group of prioritised sites, which will be completed by the end of this year. By reopening sites only when it is safe to do so, the organisation continues to put the health and safety of individuals first.

**Roz McCall:** In 2022, Elcho castle closed due to Historic Environment Scotland inspections, with no known date for reopening. It is considered one of Scotland’s best-preserved tower houses from the 1500s and is a favourite spot for family day trips. Can the minister assure me that the reopening of Elcho castle will be a priority, so that families can enjoy it during the summer months and the local economy is no longer adversely affected?

**Christina McKelvie:** I assure Roz McCall that I will have Historic Environment Scotland look into the particular site that she mentioned, and I will get back to her with the most up-to-date position on that. Those inspections and repairs, along with

all the other work that is being done, are moving on at pace, and that changes almost on a daily basis. Getting Roz McCall the most up-to-date position from Historic Environment Scotland is probably the best answer at this time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions on constitution, external affairs and culture.

There will be a brief pause before we move to the next portfolio, to allow front-bench teams to change position.

## Justice and Home Affairs

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next portfolio is justice and home affairs. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. There is quite a lot of interest in supplementaries in this portfolio, so I invite members to be as brief as possible in their questions and ministers to be as brief as possible in their answers.

### Sentencing Young People Guideline (Review)

**1. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when the next regular review of the sentencing young people guideline is due to take place. (S6O-02332)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** The timing and form of reviews of sentencing guidelines are matters for the independent Scottish Sentencing Council. Its review process for offence and offender-specific guidelines is that, after one year, it will consider data on relevant cases and engage with sentencers to assess whether the guideline has had the intended effect and identify any unintended consequences or emergent trends as a result of the guideline.

After three years, the council will review data on relevant cases over that period and engage with sentencers on their experience of using the guideline and publish a review of the guideline’s operation, detailing the impact of the guideline over the medium term.

**Jeremy Balfour:** In January last year, the Scottish National Party’s sentencing quango introduced the sentencing of young people guideline, which applies to all criminals under the age of 25 and allows them to get off with lighter sentences. That is despite widespread opposition from the public, 71 per cent of whom say that the guideline should not apply to such a high age limit. We have now seen the guideline used so that rapists avoid jail and murderers get much-reduced sentences.

Why did the First Minister, who was the justice secretary at the time, support these guidelines, and when will they be developed?

**Angela Constance:** If the member does not mind, I will correct him—these are not the SNP's sentencing guidelines; they are the Scottish Sentencing Council's guidelines. During the passage of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010, in which the form and function, and the role and responsibilities, of the Scottish Sentencing Council were set out and agreed, the Parliament as a whole had a voice.

I have set out to the member the processes through which the Sentencing Council keeps under review its guidelines. It takes very seriously its responsibilities to engage with the public and inform the public about the role and purpose of sentencing, which includes rehabilitation as well as punishment.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I understand that sentencing guidelines make it clear that a prison sentence remains an option for the court when it comes to heinous crimes such as rape and murder. Will the cabinet secretary provide figures for the number of rape convictions that have resulted in a custodial penalty since 2018?

**Angela Constance:** The latest published statistics, covering the period between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2021, show that 327 people were convicted of rape. Of those, 322—98 per cent—received a custodial sentence. Of course, rape trials are dealt with in the High Court, which has unlimited sentencing powers, up to life sentencing. Members might be interested to know that the average sentence for rape is six years and eight months and that prison sentences have, on average across all offences, increased by 14 per cent.

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** There have now been a number of cases in relation to which there been huge public concern about the sentences given to offenders convicted of rape and in which the judge has said that the sentence was significantly reduced due to the young persons sentencing guideline. Given that the guideline was introduced and has created a significant change without the involvement of Parliament, will the cabinet secretary do what she can to ensure that there is a debate on the impact of the guideline in Government time?

**Angela Constance:** As I stated to Mr Balfour, Parliament did have a voice when it passed legislation on the powers of the Scottish Sentencing Council. I was certainly in Parliament at that time—I sat on the justice committee—and I assure members that there was a full debate on

these matters, although there was not necessarily consensus on all the detail.

On the Scottish Sentencing Council's functions in relation to reviewing, as I have outlined, it will carry out an interim review to look at initial decisions that have been made in cases in which the guidance has been applied, but also at decisions in cases in which the guidance has not been applied. Of course, it is down to judicial discretion whether sentencers choose to apply the guidance, but they would have to provide written reasons for that decision. Over the three-year period, once court processes and appeal court processes have perhaps been fulfilled in relevant cases, much more robust and thorough data will be published by the Scottish Sentencing Council.

### Child Victims (Rights in Legislation)

2. **Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how forthcoming legislation will advance the rights of child victims of crime. (S6O-02333)

**The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown):** The Scottish Government is committed to advancing the rights of child victims through legislative and non-legislative measures. Both the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill and the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill contain provisions to increase protection for the privacy and dignity of child victims. We recognise that children find aspects of the system particularly traumatising, so they will benefit from the trauma-informed and person-centred approaches that underpin the legislation.

We have also published our vision for the bairns' hoose, which is a transformational, whole-system approach to delivering child protection, justice and health support and services to child victims.

**Ruth Maguire:** I welcome the measures that the minister outlined. Does she agree that advancing and balancing the rights of all children who come into contact with our justice system, whether they are child victims of criminal harm, witnesses or children who cause harm to others, is of the utmost importance, and that any legislation made in this place must get it right for every child?

**Siobhian Brown:** Yes, I do agree.

It is a finely balanced area. Care must be taken to ensure that the Kilbrandon ethos of the children's hearings system is followed, which has the needs and the welfare of the child subject to the referral at its centre, and that that is not compromised. The rights of a child victim must be carefully balanced against the rights of the referred child whose privacy and welfare needs are being considered at a children's hearing.

Crucially, children's hearings are not a criminal justice setting. The system is welfare based rather than being punitive.

**Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** One in four cases sent to a children's reporter are for alleged crimes—which are often serious—yet Victim Support Scotland describes an “information vacuum” with victims not being entitled to details of their case. Will the minister ensure that victims are no longer kept in the dark and that their rights are central to the new bill?

**Siobhian Brown:** If a child is placed in secure care via the children's hearings system, the provisions that govern information sharing in that system allow for information about whether a compulsory supervision order has been made or how the hearing was otherwise changed. There is no provision in the bill to share information beyond that, because it is not an offence or behaviour alone that determines where a child is placed or for how long.

The system takes a holistic approach and considers how the child's welfare needs as well as offence and behaviour engage with the secure care criteria.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** “The Independent Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls Services” was published yesterday. It recommended that children and young people experiencing domestic abuse are identified as victims in their own right in law. How does the Scottish Government intend to respond to that recommendation?

**Siobhian Brown:** The review report was published yesterday and we are considering its recommendations.

The bill is part of a wider strategic programme of work including the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill and work on the bairns' hoose. Ongoing engagement is taking place with officials who are leading on this area to ensure that there is a joined-up approach across Government.

### Whole-life Sentences

**3. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the introduction of whole-life sentences as an option for judges in relation to the most serious offences. (S6O-02334)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** Judges in Scotland set the punishment part of life sentences. The punishment part of a life sentence is the period that must be served in custody. Under that long-standing law, judges have the power to set a punishment part that exceeds

“the remainder of the prisoner's natural life.”

That can result in a whole-life sentence in individual cases.

The Scottish Government supports the courts having those powers available for the most serious offences.

**Alexander Stewart:** Jill Barclay's case is horrific. According to the judge who presided over it, she was murdered in a “medieval” way. Under Scots law, the judge was required to impose a punishment that resulted in the sentence being 24 years, which was reduced from 29 years, due to the murderer being under the age of 25. The sentence means that it is feasible in this vile case that the murderer could be released while in his 40s. Does the cabinet secretary not agree that judges should, at the very least, have the opportunity to impose whole-life sentences for such barbaric cases?

**Angela Constance:** Our thoughts and prayers are with all those impacted by the brutal murder of Ms Barclay.

With respect, I say to Mr Stewart that I have just made very clear to this Parliament what the law currently is: punishment parts can exceed a prisoner's natural life. He will also be aware that there is no automatic release for prisoners with whole-life sentences.

The member might be interested to look at the information that the Parole Board for Scotland has provided. If he does, he will get a sense of the seriousness with which it takes its duties. For example, in 2021, it released only a small proportion of people who came up for parole or release on parole licence.

I believe that we should be leaving this in the hands of the judges and the experts. They will, of course, through their own sentencing statements, make clear what guidance they have and have not taken into consideration.

I repeat that, since the early 2000s, the punishment part of a prisoner's sentence can exceed their natural life when a judge decides that that is appropriate. I would contend that that is an appropriate decision for a judge, not a politician.

**Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP):** Can the cabinet secretary confirm that prisoners can already be kept in prison by an order for lifelong restriction when there is a concern for public safety? Can she also confirm that it was the Scottish National Party Government that ended the previous system of early release for serious offenders that had been introduced by the Conservatives?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** As briefly as possible, cabinet secretary.

**Angela Constance:** I can, of course, confirm that prisoners who are serving orders for lifelong restriction remain in custody if there is a concern about public safety. In 2021-2022, the Parole Board for Scotland considered for parole 90 prisoners who were serving such sentences. Not one was released. That shows how seriously the Parole Board takes its responsibilities.

Also, yes, it is a matter of record that it was this Government that ended early release for the most dangerous offenders, in 2015.

### **Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2021**

**4. Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2021 has assisted the police in responding to reports of assault, threat or abuse of retail workers. (S6O-02335)

**The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown):** Information provided by Police Scotland indicates that in the period since the 2021 act came into force, between August 2021 and February 2023, more than 5,000 reports of assaults or of threatening or abusive behaviour against retail workers have been received. Clearly, that number of reported incidents is very concerning and is unacceptable, but I hope that it also shows that retail employees are aware of the legislation and are using it. Last November, Police Scotland launched the national assault pledge and #NotPartOfTheJob campaign. It has also established a retailers forum where retailers can discuss issues and concerns and share best practice.

**Clare Haughey:** I have recently been contacted by representatives of the GMB trade union, who informed me that the Asda Blantyre store in my constituency has been the target of antisocial behaviour. Staff have been threatened and left feeling intimidated. Clearly, no one should have to put up with violence, threats or abuse in their workplace. Can the minister outline the work that the Scottish Government and the police are doing to promote awareness of the law, to ensure that retail staff know their rights and, most importantly, to deter such behaviour from occurring in the first place?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, please move your microphone slightly towards you.

**Siobhian Brown:** Thank you.

I very much agree that no one should have to put up with violence or threats in their workplace. We fully support law enforcement agencies having extensive powers to deal with such incidents.

When the law came into force, in 2021, the Scottish Government worked with Crimestoppers, Fearless and the Scottish Grocers Federation to run an awareness-raising campaign. I agree that it is important that workers and retailers know that the new law can help to protect them.

In addition, the member might be interested to know that a business crime prevention team within Police Scotland carries out business engagement days throughout Scotland to support the retail sector. It has also implemented the your safety matters external partners group, which consists of 14 members, including representatives of the retail sector.

I assure the member that the Scottish Government takes the matter very seriously. Coincidentally, I am meeting Dr Pete Cheema, from the Scottish Grocers Federation, this afternoon about this issue.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** On the 5,000 reports of abuse that the minister mentioned, what was lacking in her answer was how many people were prosecuted as a result. I would be grateful for that information. Of the people who were prosecuted, did any receive a custodial sentence? The 2021 act carries a maximum penalty of 12 months' imprisonment which, under the presumption against short sentencing, means that no one will actually go to prison for such an offence.

**Siobhian Brown:** I do not have those figures at hand, but I am happy to write to Jamie Greene with them.

### **Police Officers (Resourcing)**

**5. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that police officers are fully resourced. (S6O-02336)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** We are fully committed to using the resources that are available to us to support the vital work of the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland. We are investing £1.45 billion in policing this year.

Policing is, and will continue to be, a priority for this Government. We have more police officers per capita in Scotland than there are in England and Wales, and they are also better paid, having been supported by more than £11.6 billion of funding since 2013. That investment is delivering benefits. Police-recorded crime has fallen by 42 per cent since 2006-07, and it is currently at one of the lowest levels seen since 1974.

**Brian Whittle:** In a recent meeting with a Police Scotland chief superintendent, he informed me that, of the 15,000 call-outs that the police had in

April, only 19 per cent were for criminal activity, with the majority of the remaining call-outs being mental health related. That is against a backdrop of reducing police numbers—there has been a drop of 600 since 2017—the hollowing-out of backroom staff, and an increase in mental health issues. That is the reality. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that the pressures on the police force are increasing and that the role that they are there to perform is coming under threat?

**Angela Constance:** I very much recognise that Police Scotland is under pressure as a result of the amount of time that is being taken to deal with calls requesting help and support for vulnerable people, who are quite often people with mental health problems. I have of course discussed the matter with the chief constable, the Scottish Police Authority and the staff associations and given them my commitment that we need to find better ways of working.

The chief constable is absolutely right to say that we will not follow practice in the Metropolitan Police, for example, and that policing in Scotland has a responsibility for broader safety and wellbeing. However, it is not beyond our wit to find ways to ensure that the justice system and the health system work better together to provide a better service to some of our most vulnerable citizens. That is in everybody's interests, not least those of police officers.

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** Can the cabinet secretary provide any details about the starting salaries for police officers in Scotland compared to those of their counterparts elsewhere in the United Kingdom?

**Angela Constance:** As we know, police officers play a vital role in keeping Scotland safe, and I am pleased that our officers are the best paid in the UK. That recognises the hard work and dedication of Police Scotland. Officers in Scotland who are at the maximum pay for each and every rank will earn more than their counterparts in England and Wales, and the basic starting salary for a constable in Scotland is around £5,000 more than in England and Wales.

### **Women Leaving Coercive and Abusive Relationships (Support)**

6. **Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures it will put in place to support women in the immediate days and weeks after they leave a coercive and abusive relationship. (S6O-02337)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** Domestic abuse is abhorrent, and I encourage anyone experiencing it to seek help and to report incidents to the police.

Our victim surcharge fund and Victim Support Scotland's emergency assistance fund are already in place and provide immediate expenses for women who are fleeing abusive relationships.

Through the delivering equally safe fund, we will provide approximately £12.5 million in 2023-24 to domestic abuse support services, including women's aid organisations that provide specialist support and access to temporary accommodation. Additionally, our victim-centred approach fund is providing £18.5 million from 2022 to 2025 for specialist advocacy support, and we support the Scottish Women's Rights Centre, which offers free legal advice to women who are experiencing gender-based violence.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Last week, a woman came to my surgery to highlight the financial vulnerabilities and insecurity of many women leaving domestic violence situations. As we have heard, many in such situations are left financially insecure and, because of the coercion experienced, are isolated with few opportunities to build connections and get work. Therefore, what support is available to women in the immediate days after leaving a relationship and specifically to help women to reaccess employment and training when the time is right? Would the Government consider putting in place a mentorship or peer support scheme to help women to rebuild the connections that they need?

**Angela Constance:** I will not repeat the various funds that I outlined in my original answer, but Ms Duncan-Glancy makes an important point. In addition to the work that I outlined, we are working with Scottish Women's Aid and other organisations to understand what more can be done to establish a fund for survivors, particularly those who have children and who are at risk of homelessness. Important work is also being led by colleagues who are working on homelessness, bearing in mind that domestic abuse is one of the leading causes of homelessness for women.

The member's point about mentorship and enabling women to get back into the workplace or training is well made. Of course, the Scottish Government funds various employability programmes, but I give the member an undertaking that I will ensure that we have joined all the dots in that regard.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have a couple of requests for supplementary questions. They will need to be brief, as will the responses.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** According to research that was published earlier this year, Scotland's domestic abuse legislation better reflects victims' experiences. Will the cabinet secretary outline how the Scottish Government is building on that work to ensure that

victims are at the heart of Scotland's justice system?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please answer as briefly as possible, cabinet secretary.

**Angela Constance:** The new domestic abuse offence has, of course, given more powers to police and courts to punish perpetrators of abuse and protect people who are at risk. However, as the report that Ms Harper mentioned highlights, more still needs to be done. I for one acknowledge the very clear message that improvements could be made, for example, to how domestic abuse cases are handled to provide victims with a greater voice in proceedings and to support them through the process.

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** The United Kingdom Government is providing lifeline payments to help victims to leave abusive relationships and rebuild their lives. Although I welcome the fact that the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 allows domestic abusers to be removed from the homes of their victims, more than two years has passed since the legislation was passed and its provisions have still not been enforced. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on the parts of the 2021 act that are not being enforced? Will she also match the life-saving fund here, in Scotland, so that we can change, and potentially save, the lives of hundreds of women?

**Angela Constance:** I share Ms Gosal's concern; she makes a fair point. Let me reassure her that the implementation board was established to work with all partners in that regard. An operational working group comprising vital partners has also been established.

We have done some detailed walk-through work to understand the practical issues that stand in the way of implementation. In short, the issues relate to the higher than anticipated volume of cases, the challenging tight timescales for operational justice partners and challenges in how children's views can be gathered in a way that does not cause them additional harm.

I share Ms Gosal's frustration. We are absolutely on this.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We will get through the final two questions, but there is no time for any supplementary questions.

#### **Image-based Sexual Abuse (Gaps in Law)**

**7. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether there are any gaps in Scots law in relation to tackling image-based sexual abuse. (S6O-02338)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** A wide range of criminal laws relate to image-based sexual abuse, including legislation concerning indecent images of children and the offence of coercing a person to view a sexual image. Since 2016, it has been an offence for a person to share an intimate image of another person when they either intend to cause that person to suffer fear, alarm or distress, or are reckless as to whether the sharing of the image would be likely to cause fear, alarm or distress. However, we keep the criminal law under review and will always consider whether further legislation is needed.

**Pauline McNeill:** Research shows that the swapping, collating and posting of nude images of women without their consent is on the rise. However, unlike revenge porn, that is not a crime. As the cabinet secretary outlined, under current Scots law, there must be proof that the perpetrator intended to cause, or was reckless in causing, fear, alarm or distress. However, the offence is limited in that proof of specific motivation is required, which means that many cases of cyberflashing are excluded. There is international best practice on the matter—such as that in New South Wales and many US states—which criminalises the non-consensual distribution of intimate images without the requirement to prove specific motivation. That is where there might be a gap in the law.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I need a question, please.

**Pauline McNeill:** Does the cabinet secretary take a view on whether adopting a consent-based cyberflashing law might be beneficial here? At the very least, would she be prepared to discuss the matter with me?

**Angela Constance:** In short, I am aware of the concerns that Ms McNeill expressed at the Criminal Justice Committee. I have seen a read-out of her comments. At face value, I am not convinced that there is a gap, but we will look at the experience of New South Wales, and I am more than happy to discuss the detail with Ms McNeill if she wishes.

#### **Methil Fire Station**

**8. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that the second appliance at Methil fire station will be withdrawn from service by 4 September 2023. (S6O-02339)

**The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown):** It is right that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, in common with all public bodies in Scotland, reviews its operations in order to modernise and ensure that it

is meeting needs and delivering value for money. As part of the review, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service plans to temporarily withdraw 10 fire appliances from service from September 2023, but I have been assured by the fire service that those removals will not compromise community safety.

**Willie Rennie:** There is utter astonishment in the Levenmouth area that the fire appliance will be withdrawn. There has been a spate of fires in nightclubs, shops and hotels—in fact, just this week, there was a fire in the little village of Springfield. Is the Government sure that this is the right time to cut the fire service budget and to allow the cut at Methil fire station to go ahead?

**Siobhian Brown:** The Scottish Government has provided the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service with an additional budget of £4.4 million on top of the £10 million uplift that was set out in the 2023-24 budget announcement. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has advised me that locations have been identified through risk modelling using historical incident data and have been assessed as being the least impactful in relation to response times for the first and second appliances attending incidents.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service currently has in the region of 635 operational fire appliances across Scotland and this modest reduction will allow it to ensure that more of the remaining 625 operational appliances are always available for deployment. The service has extended an invitation to any member who wishes to raise concerns with the local service officers to discuss that issue.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business.

## Deposit Return Scheme

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

The next item of business is a statement by Lorna Slater on the deposit return scheme. The minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:51

### **The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater):**

In 2020, the Scottish Parliament voted for a deposit return scheme for single-use drinks containers in which the onus for dealing with the disposal and reuse of those containers is placed on the companies that produce them—the polluter-pays principle. The Parliament did so because it looked around the world and saw that deposit return schemes worked, with more than 50 schemes worldwide. It did so because it recognised the benefits of dramatically reduced litter, a step change in recycling rates and having yet another tool in the fight against climate change, as well as that those benefits increase the larger the scope of the scheme is. It did so because the case is strongest, both economically and environmentally, where schemes are all-inclusive. It did so because it took in good faith a United Kingdom-wide agreement on the introduction of deposit return schemes that include glass. After all, only a few months before, the UK Government had been elected on just such a promise. Rishi Sunak, Alister Jack and Douglas Ross were all elected on the promise of a full deposit return scheme.

The Scottish Parliament voted for that all-inclusive deposit return scheme because it was the latest in a long list of ways in which it has used its powers to deliver distinctive and progressive policies for Scotland, such as the Scottish child payment, free bus travel for under-22s, better rights for tenants, free tuition for students and the indoor smoking ban.

That is the context in which I am updating Parliament today.

Last week, I told Parliament of the communication from the UK Government that, at the 11th hour, imposed a number of highly significant conditions on our scheme, including the removal of glass. It did so by refusing to agree a full exclusion from the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 after almost two years of discussion.

The UK Government has offered no justification for removing one of the most significant aspects of the scheme, which the Scottish Parliament voted for—namely, the inclusion of glass. The decision letter says:



“The UK Government notes the strong representations made by relevant businesses”.

The environmental and economic case for including glass in our DRS is clear, and the scheme follows the majority of schemes operating successfully around the world. Glass is one of the three main materials used to make single-use drinks containers, and it accounts for more than a quarter of all the containers to be included in our deposit return scheme as planned. It is one of the most common items to pollute our beaches, and broken glass poses a hazard to children, pets and wildlife. Local authority, private sector and voluntary clean-up crews are left to deal with littered glass.

Indeed, the UK Government’s own analysis quantified those benefits and acknowledged that the social and economic benefits of DRS are increased by 64 per cent when glass is included. That is why the Scottish Government proceeded in good faith to include glass in our DRS, backed by the Scottish Parliament, and that is why businesses have invested millions of pounds in the infrastructure to handle glass.

Up until March 2022, the UK Government itself had planned to include glass in the English scheme. As recently as January this year, it also confirmed that Wales would include glass in its DRS and that it was for each of the devolved nations to decide on the scope of its DRS.

However, this is not just about glass. An even bigger act of sabotage comes from the UK Government’s imposing a number of other conditions, including a maximum cap on deposit levels agreed across all nations, one administration fee to cover all schemes across the UK, one barcode for use across all parts of the UK, and one logo for all schemes. Those aspects are all absolutely legitimate areas of discussion in relation to the alignment and interoperability of schemes. However, the critical point right now is that the UK Government cannot tell us what those are or when they will be finalised. Indeed, it cannot tell us whether they will even appear in regulations or whether, as appears likely, they will be delegated to a scheme delivery body that is at least two and a half years away from being established—a body that will not be empowered to deliver a DRS in Scotland.

The Scottish Government has said from day 1 that we recognise the need for alignment and for schemes across the UK to work in tandem. However, let us be clear: Scotland has proceeded as planned. Wales, too, has worked on the basis of the common UK position—*[Interruption.]* It is England that has chosen to step out of line. In matters of alignment—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Minister, please allow me a moment. It is really important that the statement is heard without intervention or interruption. I would be grateful if we could proceed on that basis.

**Lorna Slater:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

In matters of alignment, whose line is it? Is it just the line of the biggest player on the field?

We are being invited to go ahead with a scheme in Scotland in which rules that we set now can be changed unilaterally by the UK Government at any time. I sought a further meeting with my ministerial counterpart in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to seek assurances that we could have a stable basis on which to go forward, but it is clear that the UK Government has simply not yet done the work and is not in a position to give the assurances that Scottish businesses need.

Earlier today, the First Minister and I met a wide range of businesses to discuss where the UK Government’s 11th hour intervention leaves us. I am grateful for the constructive and focused feedback that we received today. The single biggest message from business is the need for certainty—for planning and investment. The UK Government’s conditions blow a massive hole in any certainty.

Since we received the UK’s decision 12 days ago, we have engaged intensively with delivery partners, including Circularity Scotland and industry, to understand how the decision affects their preparations for the launch of Scotland’s DRS. The removal of glass and the imposition of as yet unspecified conditions have been pored over intensively. Although Circularity Scotland has been optimistic that the scheme could go ahead without glass, the feedback from producers, retailers and hospitality is overwhelmingly that they cannot prepare for a March launch based on the changes that are required by the UK Government without any certainty even about what those changes might be. Because the delivery of DRS is an industry-led project, those views are critical.

Today, the First Minister and I heard that industry, in turn, recognises the enormous amount of work carried out by its body, Circularity Scotland, on its behalf and acknowledges the case for sustaining a delivery vehicle for the DRS to come.

The UK Government’s decision excludes glass from Scotland’s DRS at the 11th hour, contrary to the will of the Scottish Parliament and the all-UK basis on which we planned. It changes the playing field for non-glass drinks producers. It creates massive new uncertainty for business by imposing conditions for interoperability with schemes in the

rest of the UK that have not even been legislated for and which even then might not be clear.

Yesterday, I told Parliament that our scheme cannot proceed as planned. The refusal of the UK Government to budge on glass alone makes that obvious. As of today, it is clear that we have been left with no option other than to delay the launch of Scotland's DRS until October 2025 at the earliest, based on the UK Government's current stated aspirations.

I remain committed to interoperable deposit return schemes across the UK, provided that we can work in the spirit of collaboration, not imposition. I wrote to the UK Government again last night to urge ministers to reset a climate of trust and good faith, and to galvanise and retain the knowledge that has been built in Circularity Scotland and DRS partners in Scotland.

Today, I have written to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee in Parliament to say that we will be seeking to revisit the regulations that we laid in Parliament in mid-May, which set our launch date of 1 March and made other changes to the scheme. The immediate priority is to bring forward regulations to amend the go-live date. Subsequently, I will also consider how to bring forward revised provisions to deal with the UK Government's exclusion of glass and how best to reflect the decisions made so far by the Scottish Parliament.

Let me be clear: the Scottish Parliament voted for a deposit return scheme. I am committed to a deposit return scheme. Scotland will have a deposit return scheme. It will come later than need be. It will be more limited than it should be. It will be more limited than what Parliament voted for and more limited than what I want, what other devolved nations wanted, and even what the Tories wanted at the time of the last election.

Those delays and dilutions lie squarely in the hands of a UK Government that, sadly, has so far seemed more intent on sabotaging the Scottish Parliament than on protecting our environment. [Applause.]

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you. Continue, minister.

**Lorna Slater:** However, I will work as hard as I can with the UK Government and other devolved Governments to play the hand that we have been dealt—for a cleaner environment, for less waste, and to meet our climate targets. It is our future.

**The Presiding Officer:** The minister will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on. I would be grateful if members who wish to ask a question press their request-to-speak buttons now.

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement.

Let us be clear: the scheme had already failed long before any intervention by the UK Government. Today's statement reflects the key concern of businesses about having a scheme that works across the United Kingdom. I believe that we could have saved a great deal of time and energy if the Scottish National Party and the Greens had listened to those businesses in the first place. Nevertheless, this is an attempt to salvage something from the wreckage of a disastrous scheme.

Just days ago, the minister and the First Minister were indulging in reckless scaremongering, threatening to scrap the scheme if glass was not included. They tried the old nationalist trick of picking a fight with the UK Government, but it backfired. [Interruption.] They were rumbled, misrepresenting one of Scotland's leading drinks producers. Then, Circularity Scotland and the logistics partner Biffa both confirmed that the scheme can go ahead without glass.

The fact remains that, just days ago, the SNP and Greens were ready to abandon the deposit return scheme. Humza Yousaf announced that

“the removal of glass fundamentally threatens the viability of Scotland's DRS”.

Can the minister tell us: was the First Minister using glass as an excuse to ditch the scheme, or did he just not know what he was talking about?

**Lorna Slater:** I am unclear whether the member understands the situation as I have laid it out. [Interruption.] As I have set out, we will look forward to a date of October 2025 for Scotland's deposit return scheme, which is the earliest possible date by which the UK Government has committed to delivering its scheme.

The main conditions that have been applied to the scheme through the use of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 place us in an impossible position. Going ahead of the UK would mean asking businesses to comply with regulations that we have not seen yet. For example, in its letter to us on IMA exclusion, the UK Government stated that it wants to set a maximum cap on deposit levels. This Parliament passed regulations for a deposit return scheme with a 20p deposit. If the UK set the cap at 10p, 15p or 30p, that would be a substantial change for Scottish businesses. How are we to proceed with a scheme on the basis that we have to wait for the UK Government to make that kind of decision before we can give business any certainty?

That is the impossible position that the UK Government has put us in and the basis upon which we are being forced to delay the scheme beyond what we would have liked.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I have to say that the late notice of the statement did not assist with parliamentary scrutiny.

On the content of the statement, it is clear that Scotland is paying the price for two bad Governments, both of which seem more interested in a constitutional fight—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear Ms Boyack.

**Sarah Boyack:** I know that members will not all agree with me, but let me say what it is: it is a constitutional fight rather than constructive work with each other and—critically—stakeholders to get a viable deposit return scheme that works for the whole of Scotland.

Yesterday, the minister refused my constructive suggestion that she meet a key stakeholder. That was on the back of the decision that the contract be handed to a US hedge fund instead of the scheme being co-produced with our local authorities and the Government's refusal to meet key stakeholders or provide clarity or certainty to producers or businesses over the past two years. The UK Government, on the other hand, is acting utterly indefensibly, given its own manifesto pledge, instead of getting round the table to find a scheme that works.

Now that we have another delay, will the minister tell the Parliament how she will act in the next two and a half years to ensure that—finally—we get a scheme that is a success, that will increase recycling and that will reduce waste?

**Lorna Slater:** I thank the member for that constructive question, because the question is how we move forward in the next two and a half years with a UK Government that has been a bad-faith actor throughout.

Initially, the UK Government said that it would put glass into the scheme, and it then removed it. As recently as January, it said that devolved nations could do what they liked, and it then changed its mind in May and said, "Oh no, you can't do what you like." The UK Government dithered for months and months about giving us the clarity that businesses need on how VAT would be handled by the scheme, and it still has not given us the answers that we need on trading standards for shelf-edge labelling.

We are—absolutely—working in good faith. We went through the stages of the common framework decision, and we have published those stages and the communiqués associated with them. At every point, we acted in good faith, working towards the UK Internal Market Act 2020

exclusion. It is the UK Government that has changed its mind.

When the First Minister and I met industry representatives this morning, they highlighted the fact that the list of uncertainty issues includes ones on which the UK Government still has not given certainty. It is now for the UK Government to work through those issues. It needs to pass its regulations, bring us certainty on trading standards and answer the questions that it has taken the power away from this Parliament to answer.

**The Presiding Officer:** There is much interest in the subject, as members would expect. I would be grateful for concise questions and responses.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** The common frameworks that were agreed between the UK Government and the devolved legislatures of the UK were the mechanism by which constructive engagement would facilitate regulatory divergence and respect the devolution process. By invoking the UK Internal Market Act 2020 on the deposit return scheme, has the UK Government irrevocably damaged the frameworks process?

**Lorna Slater:** That is a serious concern that we should all have. The UK Government appears to have torn up the common frameworks—the agreements by which the Governments work together. My Labour colleague asked us to work in a spirit of good co-operation with the UK Government, and those frameworks were how we did that. The UK Government has torn them up and it is not at all clear to me how we move forward if that tool no longer exists for co-operation between the Governments. That should be deeply concerning to all of us.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** On 23 May, I asked the minister how much the Scottish Government had budgeted for its DRS. She did not know. On 30 May, I asked again. The minister did not know but said that she would write to me imminently. It is taxpayers' money and a competent minister ought to know the figure, so I ask the minister again: how much has the Scottish Government budgeted for the scheme and what impact will her decision have on the budget?

**Lorna Slater:** I am sure that the member has seen the representation in letters from Biffa and Circularity Scotland, which detail the level of investment that industry has made in the scheme. It is an industry-led and industry-funded scheme. Biffa has cited tens of millions of pounds that it has invested. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear the minister.

**Lorna Slater:** Circularity Scotland has cited the hundreds of millions of pounds that have been invested, collectively, by members of the industry

in the scheme. The scheme is to be funded by industry. It is not a Government-funded scheme.

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** Scotland had its Parliament restored to afford this country a measure of self-government, but Westminster has blocked Scotland at every turn, on equalities issues and now on environmental issues. The UK Government is making a mockery of devolution by trying to hollow out the powers of our Parliament, and the Scottish Tories are happy to be complicit in that.

If we are not to use the powers of devolution to prevent waste and litter to tackle environmental and social issues, what exactly is devolution for?

**Lorna Slater:** The member is exactly right. The purpose of devolution is to allow us, in Scotland, to make different rules that might apply to our different situation. We have used the powers of devolution successfully to make progressive changes to improve the lives of people in Scotland, such as free bus travel for under-22s and the implementation, earlier than the UK Government, of a ban on smoking.

At the time of the implementation of the smoking ban, the UK Government did not have the powers under the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 that it has now. We can only imagine how the UK Government might have used those powers to delay Scotland implementing a smoking ban. It has now given itself such powers, which it can use to intervene on devolved issues. The UK Government can now interfere with and block many things that we do to protect our environment and deal with social issues. That should concern all of us who believe in Scottish devolution.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The minister has just described the UK Government's approach as an "act of sabotage", but it is this Government that is cancelling the scheme after spending £218 million—*[Interruption.]* Yes, the Scottish Government has spent £218 million—it is there in black and white on the Scottish Government's website—*[Interruption.]* *[Mercedes Villalba has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear Ms Villalba.

**Mercedes Villalba:** —with no proposed alternative to meet its target of recycling 70 per cent of waste by 2025.

Will the minister be honest with the public and take some responsibility for the fact that the SNP and the First Minister himself sabotaged the scheme by repeatedly talking it down during their bitter leadership contest? *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Members! I remind you of the need to conduct business with courtesy and respect.

**Lorna Slater:** As I told the Parliament when we introduced the delay from August this year to 1 March next year, it is the UK Government's delay in granting us an exclusion from the internal market act that has caused the uncertainty.

The pot was stirred by the Secretary of State for Scotland in February of this year. In January of this year, the UK Government's own documentation said that it was for the devolved nations to make decisions on the scope of their schemes. The Secretary of State for Scotland then sowed doubt in all our minds by threatening to use the internal market act to block our scheme. At that point, the friction on delivery of the scheme and the uncertainty that had been created by the words of the secretary of state meant that I had to come to Parliament to announce a delay.

The secretary of state has now made good on his threat and has implemented a version of the IMA exclusion that is only temporary, which puts us in an impossible position. I will share with Mercedes Villalba the example that I shared with her fellow member earlier. The UK Government has said that the maximum cap on deposit levels will have to be agreed before our scheme launches. The UK Government has not set a cap on deposits, set a deposit or passed its regs. What if the UK Government's deposit is 10p or 30p? We cannot tell Scottish businesses to go ahead with the scheme when we do not even know what the deposit amount is. The UK Government has put the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government in the impossible situation of having to ask Scottish businesses to comply with regulations that do not even exist.

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** Polling that was conducted in 2021 indicated that one in 15 Tory MPs do not believe that climate change is real and that 9 per cent of Tory MPs said that they did not accept that there is a scientific consensus on human activity causing climate change. The Conservative Party reportedly received £3.5 million from individuals and entities linked to climate denial—among other things—last year.

**The Presiding Officer:** Is there a question, Ms Stewart, and is it related to the statement?

**Kaukab Stewart:** Minister, are those really the people who we want telling us that we cannot pass environmentally conscious legislation?

**The Presiding Officer:** Please respond on matters for which the Government has general responsibility.

**Lorna Slater:** The UK Government has shown no commitment to tackling climate change, and this is another example of the Scottish Parliament voting to take practical action to deal with the

climate and nature emergencies and the UK Government interfering to block it.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Let us remember that this is the fourth delay to the introduction of the DRS. Is it the case that the DRS is only the latest victim of two Governments that see political advantage in stoking division and indulging in constitutional spats? What does the minister plan to do to provide reassurance to businesses across Scotland?

**Lorna Slater:** The First Minister and I met representatives of businesses today, and certainty is exactly what they are asking for. The uncertainty that is being created is being created by the UK Government, which delayed its decision on the internal market act and which is now asking Scottish businesses to comply with regulations that do not even exist. That is absolutely the kind of uncertainty that Scottish businesses cannot tolerate.

The Scottish Government has worked at all times as a good-faith actor by following the common frameworks and agreed processes. We can see that the UK Government has not done so. I wrote to my counterpart at DEFRA yesterday to ask for the opportunity to reset our relationship so that we can work together in good faith from now on. That is very much how I would like to proceed. I have yet to hear back from her.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** As the minister has just said, businesses and producers have invested millions of pounds in the scheme, and the UK Government has now dealt a massive blow to the certainty that they had previously. Can she offer any hope or comment on the uncertainty for businesses?

**Lorna Slater:** As I have said to other members, the First Minister and I met business representatives this morning to discuss what they need, and they said that they need certainty on what the regulations will look like—on basic things, such as what the deposit will be. The Scottish Parliament said that it would be 20p, but what will the UK Government say? What will the UK Government say about how the scheme administration works? What will the UK Government say about barcodes and labelling? Those things are entirely unknown and uncertain.

I have written to my UK counterpart to ask that we have a constructive dialogue on those matters. I have yet to hear back from her, but I hope that we can work towards that so that we can have a successful launch of Scotland's deposit return scheme.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the minister tell me what analysis she has undertaken of, and what estimates she can give about, the cost to

businesses—which will now not be recovered, at least in the short term—because of her shambolic attempt at a roll-out? Has the Scottish Government taken legal advice relating to any compensation schemes?

**Lorna Slater:** We have, of course, taken advice from many quarters on how to proceed with the scheme. We know that businesses in Scotland have invested hundreds of millions of pounds ahead of the launch of the scheme based on the regulations that were passed by the Parliament. We thank all the businesses that made that investment in good faith, and we look forward to working towards launching Scotland's deposit return scheme so that those investments can be put to good use.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** People who have been campaigning for years to get a deposit return scheme will be, justifiably, incredibly angry and worried about the delay, which has been caused by the utter contempt that is shown towards the Parliament by the Westminster Tory Government. What does the minister say to people who are worried about the likely impact on Scotland's environment and the impact on our democracy in Scotland?

**Lorna Slater:** I say to those people that I share their concerns. I share their concerns that the UK Government is not committed to protecting our environment and that it will seek to block any legislation from the Scottish Parliament to prevent damage to our environment and to tackle the climate emergency. Some of the businesses that the First Minister and I spoke with this morning said that they had already worked for six or seven years with the Scottish Government towards getting the scheme launched.

It has been an enormous investment on our part and on the part of Scottish businesses, and to have it torpedoed at the last minute by Alister Jack, who has used the clumsy tool of the 2020 act to prevent the scheme from going forward as this Parliament passed it, is extremely frustrating.

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** The UK Conservative Government that Scotland did not vote for is, yet again, holding Scotland back and preventing democratically supported policies and laws from being implemented.

Does the minister agree that being held back by the slowest deposit return scheme in the convoy when other international countries already have a scheme does not tackle waste or pollution or help the environment? Also, what state is the partial deposit return scheme for England actually in, and what guarantee is there that it will even be ready for 2025?

**Lorna Slater:** It is not only the slowest scheme but the least ambitious one. The UK has dragged

both Scotland and Wales down to the lowest common denominator. Deposit return schemes are normal. There are more than 50 such schemes around the world. It is normal to have a system in which industry pays to collect and recycle the materials that it produces. In the UK and Scotland, that cost has to be borne by the taxpayer—that is not normal and it is not the way forward.

As to the UK scheme, we do not know what state it is in—no regulations have been passed and there are no dates for when the legislation might be passed. The UK Government says that it will happen in October 2025, which is the date that it aspires to. That is the date that we will aspire to because that is the best information that we have at this time. However, as with all these matters, until the UK can give us certainty on that, we will have to treat that date with some degree of scepticism.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the ministerial statement on the deposit return scheme. My apologies to those members whom I was unable to call, but I am conscious of the need to protect time for the next item of business.

## Oil and Gas Industry

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

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-09339, in the name of Liam Kerr, on a thriving future for Scotland's oil and gas sector and its workers. I invite all members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

15:22

### **Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):**

Scotland needs oil and gas. Both currently provide around 75 per cent of the United Kingdom's energy; domestically, the UK produces about half of that figure, and that is already declining, even with new fields. We have 24 million homes that are heated by gas boilers; in 2020, oil and gas provided over 90 per cent of Scotland's heat demand; and 32 million vehicles rely on petrol and diesel. Oil and gas produce plastic medical equipment, which our hospitals use to save lives. We use oil and gas to make fertilisers for our farmers to grow the crops that feed us and to make the mobile phones and laptops that people are working on right now. That demand is not going away.

The Climate Change Committee has said that Britain will need 16 billion barrels-worth of oil and gas between now and 2050 to service a demand for electricity that is expected to nearly treble by 2050. By the mid-2030s, oil and gas will still provide 50 per cent of our energy needs, because, whether we like it or not, intermittent renewables such as solar and wind account for only about 4 per cent of our total energy needs. It is demand that is the issue here, because, while it subsists, we have to meet it from somewhere.

### **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):**

Does the member not recognise that those 16 billion barrels are also what is left in terms of extractable reserves? In other words, he might well be right that it might meet future demand, but the fact is that we have gone past peak oil. It is not the future—it is the past. This is about transition, not about continuing to use oil, is it not?

**Liam Kerr:** It absolutely is about transition, but the fact is that the member cannot get round the demand point. If there is demand, we have to ensure that the industry remains here—and remains productive and profitable. Why? Because we need it for energy security, to reduce our exposure to places such as Russia and for our economic security.

This year, the industry will add more than £20 billion to the UK's economy, employing up to 200,000 people—including 90,000 in Scotland, 95 per cent of whom are in my region of North East

Scotland. It is telling that, if no new oil and gas licences are granted, it will cost the Scottish economy £6 billion by 2030, in a context where we are, apparently, facing a £1 billion black hole.

**The Minister for Energy (Gillian Martin):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Liam Kerr:** I will, in a second.

It is imperative to note that ending the industry early will lead to higher energy bills, as the Institute of Economic Affairs has said. That is why, when the Labour Party launched what the GMB's Gary Smith described as a "stupid" and "catastrophic" policy to ban new North Sea developments, people were stunned. They asked how on earth a prospective party of government could put forward a policy that Smith described as "utterly incoherent" economically. Indeed, GMB Scotland's secretary called the policy "naive", "unnecessary" and "self harming".

Perhaps that can be explained by the UK Labour Party's ignorance, but it does not explain why Scottish Labour winds in behind that madness. Leaving aside the fact that Anas Sarwar has not even had the courtesy to acknowledge let alone reply to my letter, he was on ITV's "Representing Border" only yesterday, backing the ban on new developments. If there is any doubt about Scottish Labour's position, I remind the chamber of the motion that Monica Lennon lodged last November, stating that

"no new oil and gas licences should be approved",

which was signed by current spokespersons Sarah Boyack, Carol Mochan, Alex Rowley, Paul Sweeney, Mercedes Villalba and Martin Whitfield.

**Gillian Martin:** I take the member's point about demand. It is important that when there is demand for something, we can supply it. What are the UK Government's plans to decarbonise the gas grid?

**Liam Kerr:** The UK Government has been talking about its huge plans to decarbonise, as we have heard in the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. It is why we have the innovation and targeted oil and gas—or INTOG—grant and why the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets has proposed a new net zero duty. Huge developments are going on, which Gillian Martin, as the Minister for Energy, ought to know.

Really, the Scottish National Party has a similar problem to Labour, with its presumption against new oil and gas in its energy strategy. Last month, it wheeled out the First Minister to give some warm words to the industry. It also wheeled out Gillian Martin, Màiri McAllan and Jackie Dunbar, who were all quoted in similarly ambiguous terms. However, the people of Scotland can see that the presumption is retained in Neil Gray's amendment. The SNP is the party of Nicola Sturgeon, who was

so opposed to Cambo; of Minister Paul McLennan, who also signed Monica Lennon's motion; and of Màiri McAllan, who has been reported as saying:

"we do not agree with the UK Government issuing new oil and gas licences." —[*Official Report*, 22 November 2022; c 12.]

Meanwhile, Neil Gray, the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy, refused in a committee meeting last month to back new oil and gas development in the North Sea and then said that he did

"not have responsibility for the area".—[*Official Report, Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee*, 9 May 2023; c 21.]

The SNP must think that the north-east is buttoned up the back.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Liam Kerr:** No.

The people of Scotland know that, if the decision on granting licences for new projects was not reserved to Westminster, the SNP would be forced by its coalition with the Greens—the party that sits next to it in Government—to block every application. Patrick Harvie of the Greens claimed that supporting oil and gas makes one hard right.

I do not have time to develop the point that the current North Sea industries will be what drive net zero. Those businesses will, for example, help to develop 13GW of offshore wind capacity by 2030, with £30 billion-worth of investment. No doubt other speakers will pick that up. We have a choice between UK-produced oil and gas, and oil and gas imported from countries with weaker regulatory regimes and emissions targets and unstable politics. Taking those imports would export our jobs. Sharon Graham, Unite the Union's general secretary, has said of Labour's plans:

"Grabbing the headlines is easy, developing a serious plan for more renewable energy is not."

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Liam Kerr:** I am out of time, Mr Johnson.

Sharon Graham is correct. Neither Labour nor the SNP-Green coalition has that plan. The only party that has a credible plan for working with our oil and gas industry and renewable sectors to get to net zero, while keeping the lights on, our homes warm and the economy moving and without losing the skills and experiences that are needed in order to deliver the energy transition, is the Scottish Conservatives.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the vital role that oil and gas plays in Scotland's energy mix and in supporting tens of thousands of Scottish jobs, particularly in the north east; condemns Labour Party plans to ban new production from

the North Sea, and the Scottish Government's stated presumption against new exploration for oil and gas in the North Sea, contained in the Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan; acknowledges that there is a climate emergency and that the Scottish Government must deliver on carbon emissions targets and achieve net zero by 2045, but further acknowledges that a just transition for workers to green jobs, so that no communities are left behind, cannot be achieved without the investment, innovation and skills from the oil and gas sector and support for the North Sea industries, and calls, therefore, for the Labour Party to reverse its opposition, and for the Scottish Government to remove its presumption from the Draft Energy Strategy.

15:29

**The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray):**

The Scottish Government is absolutely committed to a just transition and ensuring that we take workers with us on our journey to net zero. For the Scottish Government, the transition is both the outcome—a fairer, greener future for all—and the process that must be undertaken in partnership with those impacted by the transition to net zero.

A just transition supports a net zero, climate-resilient economy in a way that delivers fairness and tackles inequality and injustice, and we will not do to the north-east what Margaret Thatcher did to our mining and steel communities, when people and places were callously discarded and jobs that were promised were never delivered. The impact of that thoughtless deindustrialisation is still being felt decades on by communities that I represent in Airdrie and Shotts.

The oil and gas sector, and particularly the skills, talent and experience in the north-east, must play a critical role in supporting the build-out of low-carbon technologies in Scotland. We cannot ignore the fact that there is a climate emergency, which is why we have been clear that unlimited extraction of fossil fuels is not consistent with Scotland's ambitious climate obligations, and our focus must now be on a planned and fair transition that leaves no one behind. That means that simply stopping all future activity is wrong. That could threaten energy security, while destroying the very skills that we need to transition to the new low-carbon economy.

Neither can we put our heads in the sand, as the Conservative Party seems determined to do, and behave as though the North Sea contains an endless supply of oil and gas that is cheap and easy to produce. Oil and gas workers know how challenging conditions are offshore, and energy companies know how rapidly the area is maturing. It is irresponsible of the Conservatives to suggest otherwise. Their approach risks the economic future of the north-east, would expose us to higher energy prices and compromises our energy security. They do not want a transition.

Instead, we, as a party of Government, are acting responsibly. We are facing squarely up to the challenges and planning a managed transition that supports the workers and communities of the north-east and all of Scotland, instead of putting in place the cliff edge that Gary Smith from the GMB said would result from Labour's plans for oil and gas.

Scotland has the skills, talent and natural resources with which to become a global renewables powerhouse, and our draft energy strategy and just transition plan, which was published on 10 January, sets out our vision to achieve that. An energy system that delivers affordable, resilient and clean energy supplies not only will enhance our energy security through the use and development of our own resources but means that we will generate enough cheap green electricity to power Scotland's economy and to export electricity to our neighbour, supporting jobs here in Scotland and assisting the decarbonising ambitions of our partners.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I would like to understand the Government's current position on the Rosebank licence, which we know sits with the UK Government. Will the Rosebank licence, if approved, help or hinder the just transition that we need? After all, this is not just a transition—it is a just transition for workers and communities. It is a pity that Liam Kerr would not take an intervention, but I would love to get some clarity from the Scottish Government, because I wrote to Humza Yousaf on the subject ahead of his meeting with the Prime Minister and received no response. Communities deserve better than that.

**Neil Gray:** We have said clearly that any future exploration in oil and gas production in the North Sea needs to pass much more stringent climate compatibility tests. I think that that is critically important. We have already said that the unlimited extraction of oil and gas in the North Sea is not compatible with our net zero targets.

We have just finished consulting on the energy strategy and just transition plan, and we are currently considering the responses that we have received. Later this year, we will set out a confirmation of our policy framework in that regard. The plan sets out more than 150 actions, as well as consultation on further actions to help maximise a just transition to net zero for our communities, businesses and workers. We are already doing the hard work of supporting the just transition and ensuring that it is not only just but as swift as possible.

The Scottish Government sees offshore wind as one of the most important economic and net zero opportunities. Our operational, under-construction, consented and in-planning projects, together with



the market ambitions expressed in the ScotWind and INTOG leasing rounds, set our potential renewable electricity pipeline at more than 40GW. That could produce enough electricity annually to power every home in Scotland for 17 years.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Neil Gray:** I am running out of time—I am really sorry that it is such a short debate.

In order to unlock all those potential developments, we must build on a robust offshore wind planning programme to address the challenges going forward. There is a clear need for significant new network investment to ensure that our infrastructure does not become a barrier to net zero. Although we welcome Ofgem's recent decision to accelerate the approval of strategic transmission infrastructure, the UK Government needs to take action to provide the Scottish Government with the right powers to enable us to modernise the planning and consenting system for grid infrastructure. Unfortunately, in that regard, we have the energy but we do not have the power.

As for the supply chain that is coming through, we expect ScotWind developers to invest an average of £1.4 billion per project into our economy across the 20 offshore wind projects. We need to support our offshore wind developers as they meet their supply chain commitments.

**Liam Kerr:** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Neil Gray:** I do not know whether I have time.

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

**Neil Gray:** I am very sorry that the debate is so short and that we have such a small amount of time to debate the issues, because I had much more that I wanted to say, not least in response to what has come through from the Conservative Party.

In conclusion, the rhetoric over recent weeks has demonstrated that the Tories appear not to want a transition and that Keir Starmer's Labour Party appears not to want a just transition.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, minister. I ask you to conclude on that point.

**Neil Gray:** The Tories have no regard for the planet, Labour has no regard for the workers and this SNP Government will continue to plot our path to net zero—and do so with a just transition.

**The Presiding Officer:** I am asking you to conclude, minister, so please resume your seat.

**Neil Gray:** I move amendment S6M-09339.3, to leave out from "vital" to end and insert:

"role that is played by oil and gas in the energy profile of Scotland, the tens of thousands of jobs in that sector, and the essential contribution that the sector's skilled workforce must make to Scotland's present and future energy security; recognises that the draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan sets out a future energy pathway for Scotland and highlights that, to realise its climate change ambitions, Scotland needs to transform the way it generates, transports and uses energy; notes that the Scottish Government has consulted on whether, in order to support the fastest possible and most effective just transition, there should be a presumption against new exploration for oil and gas, with a final decision to be made later in 2023; acknowledges that huge progress has been made in the energy transition in the last 20 years; reiterates its firm commitment to ensuring a just transition and that just transition principles are embedded in legislation; calls, therefore, on the UK Government to support the fastest possible just transition for the oil and gas sector; expresses deep disappointment that the UK Government has repeatedly refused to match the Scottish Government's £500 million Just Transition Fund for the north east and Moray, despite benefitting to the tune of hundreds of billions of pounds at today's prices over decades from North Sea oil and gas, and calls on the UK Government to support the deployment of carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) for the Scottish Cluster to capitalise on Scotland's competitive advantage, including its world-leading workforce, who will drive forward the just transition and help industry to decarbonise at pace."

15:36

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** Today's motion from the Tories is the height of hypocrisy. The Tories have been in power since 2010 and have presided over rising energy bills but, when it comes to the vital infrastructure and the political support that are needed to develop the renewables transformation that we urgently need across the UK, successive energy ministers have dithered and delayed.

It has to be a just transition and it has to be about planning ahead for both the short and long term. We need to bring together our energy industries, by using the skills, leadership and workers that are already in the oil and gas sector and the critical supply chains, and by developing the new manufacturing jobs in innovation, which our universities are currently working on, that will enable us to deliver on our net zero ambitions.

Over the past few days, there has been a lot of inaccurate speculation, so it is important to get the facts right, not to listen to the rumours on which the Conservative motion and Liam Kerr's desperate speech this afternoon are based. Scottish Labour is absolutely not turning the taps off now.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** That is what Keir Starmer said.

**Sarah Boyack:** That is not what Keir Starmer has said on any occasion—and nor, indeed, has Anas Sarwar.

We will work with the sector and its workers to ensure that the just transition starts now, by using our existing oil and gas fields and maximising their effectiveness, as we follow the commitments that were made at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—in Glasgow, to play our part in tackling the climate crisis that our world now faces.

**Liam Kerr:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sarah Boyack:** No—I might have done if it had been from somebody else.

We are in a global race to net zero and we are seeing none of the ambition, forward planning or strategic investment with which our global partners, such as the USA, are now moving ahead at pace.

The Tories are in serious danger, as the cabinet secretary said, of doing what they did to the miners and mining communities under Thatcher. Those communities are still suffering, so we need to learn that lesson.

**Liam Kerr:** Will the member take an intervention now?

**Sarah Boyack:** I will take a minor intervention.

**Liam Kerr:** I think that the member needs to address the fact that Gary Smith of the GMB said that the Labour plan lacks “intellectual rigour”. Who is right—Gary Smith or Keir Starmer?

**Sarah Boyack:** I have to say that it is Keir Starmer, Anas Sarwar and Ed Miliband, working with the trade unions—[*Interruption.*]

**Daniel Johnson:** It is £28 billion and 50,000 jobs.

**The Presiding Officer:** Members!

**Sarah Boyack:** I am going to come back to this, because it is about serious investment in leading in green manufacturing, and the £28 billion every year for a decade that Ed Miliband and Rachel Reeves are talking about will bring our trade unions on board, because they will see those jobs from day 1. However, we need that investment now. We have renewables projects in a queue because we do not have grid capacity. That is totally unacceptable. A grid that was incidentally designed does not address the scale of change and the new renewables that we urgently need now. Thirteen years on from the Tories taking power, they have not delivered on the renewables opportunities that we have seen developed in Scotland.

I am proud of the work that we did in Parliament to set what were then seen as radical targets, but it is bitterly disappointing that we have not seen work from the SNP to ensure that our communities

benefit from that renewables investment, whether that is the missed opportunities with ScotWind or the lack of support for our councils to power ahead on delivering municipal heat and power networks, delivering jobs and lowering bills.

Jobs are critical to that but, as the Scottish Trades Union Congress said in response to the vacuous Scottish Government energy strategy and just transition consultation, it falls dramatically short of addressing the crisis that working people face. The trade union-led Just Transition Partnership said:

“It is imperative that we have a strategy that meets our climate demands and ends fuel poverty. Instead we have a re-statement of existing policies. On the most important matters it asks questions rather than takes positions.”

We need action now. It is not good enough from either the Tories or the SNP—we have not had the focus on jobs that we need in our communities. To bring people’s existing gas and electricity costs down means investing in retrofitting our homes and other buildings, and developing heat and power networks that deliver real community benefits.

**Neil Gray:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sarah Boyack:** I will indeed.

**The Presiding Officer:** Ms Boyack is in her last 30 seconds.

**Neil Gray:** I will be very brief. On the issues of jobs, does Ms Boyack accept that the £200 million investment that is coming to Scotland from Sumitomo, which will bring 150 jobs, is just the start of the supply chain pipeline that is coming from ScotWind?

**Sarah Boyack:** It is nowhere near ambitious enough. That is the difference with Labour’s green prosperity plan—it will deliver the jobs and the investment in Scotland at the scale that we need now. It represents value for money to taxpayers, and it will deliver energy security going forward. It is a partnership between Government, business and workers to develop low-carbon renewables—solar, wind, wave and tidal—using all the resources in our existing oil and gas fields and the skills of our oil and gas workforce in Grangemouth.

**The Presiding Officer:** You must conclude, Ms Boyack.

**Sarah Boyack:** We cannot fall behind. The 35 per cent of our households living in fuel poverty need action now. We need to get moving—

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Boyack. I call Liam McArthur.

**Sarah Boyack:** Labour is committed to that action.

I move amendment S6M-09339.2, to leave out from “condemns” to end and insert:

“believes that the only way to break out of 13 years of rising energy bills and energy insecurity is to decisively move to clean, cheap, homegrown power, with a full range of energy sources; agrees that oil and gas production in the North Sea will continue for decades to come and the skills of the oil and gas workforce will be crucial to delivering this energy transformation; understands that it is vital that a phased and responsible transition is delivered and that partnership with government, business and workers will be crucial to achieving this, while managing existing oil fields for the entirety of their lifespan; further understands that the Labour Party announcement of the Green Prosperity Plan would mean an annual £28 billion investment into clean energy and green technology, which would ensure the creation of hundreds of thousands of good jobs, with decent wages, in Scotland and the UK for the decades ahead, and would give people working in energy security for the future, while transforming the UK into a clean energy superpower, and calls on the Scottish Government to deliver on carbon emissions targets and achieve net zero by 2045.”

15:41

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Today’s debate mirrors one that we had about 18 months ago. Now, as then, we need to start by acknowledging that maximum extraction is not an option—oil and gas resources will have to be left in the ground. At the same time, the motion is right to point to the current contribution of the oil and gas sector to our energy system, to our economy and to tens of thousands of jobs across the country, notably in regions such as the north-east and the Highlands and Islands.

Therefore, when we talk about a just transition, we must accept that it will look different in different parts of the country. In my Orkney constituency, as the cabinet secretary will well know, the Flotta terminal has been integral to our island economy and community, as well as at a national level, for almost half a century. The terminal has seen many changes over that time as the sector has matured. There is even talk of a potential green hydrogen plant being located on the site, linked to the proposed West of Orkney offshore wind project. That illustrates the sort of transition that we need to see, but it also underscores the complexity, sensitivity and tailored nature of that transition.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the UK Climate Change Committee scenarios anticipate oil and gas accounting for between 47 and 54 per cent of total cumulative energy demand between 2020 and 2050. A marked reduction, no doubt, but significant, and a warning of the need both to bear down on demand and to avoid simply displacing domestic production with imports that are more environmentally damaging and that create their own security of supply issues.

There is ample evidence of the willingness—indeed, appetite—of those working in the sector to be part of the energy transition. Although there are certainly transferable skills between oil and gas, and renewables, that is not always the case. The Government and agencies must do more to raise awareness of options and to make the transfer, including any retraining and skills development, as easy and as smooth as possible. That point was made in my own proposed amendment but also, thankfully, in Sarah Boyack’s and in the WWF briefing for the debate.

It is also self-evident that any just transition will require both of Scotland’s Governments to play their full, active and collaborative part, alongside local government. The UK CCC was unequivocal on that point. Bluntly, this cannot be yet another issue that gets sucked into a self-reinforcing, and ultimately self-defeating, arm wrestle over the constitution.

Neil Gray is right to challenge UK ministers over support for the Scottish cluster and development of carbon capture, usage and storage. At the same time, he needs to acknowledge his Government’s consistent failure to meet its climate targets and its inability to detail the action that it believes will get us on track to meet those targets. That detail would be helpful in relation to the energy transition fund for example. What are the year 1 objectives for the £20 million? How many workers will benefit, and in what ways? What are the predicted investments in future years? We need that detail not only to address the UK Climate Change Committee’s calls but to avoid the impression that that is more smoke and mirrors.

Key to a just transition is the creation of new green jobs. We cannot afford to leave people and communities behind. Achieving that will require plans that are radical and credible and lock in genuine collaboration between the UK and Scottish Governments, local government and the affected sectors.

As I said in the previous debate on the topic in 2021, change is unavoidable, but it is only with detailed plans and proper resourcing that it can be done in a managed and, most important, just way.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** We move to the open debate. I remind members that speeches should be up to four minutes. We do not have any time in hand. Therefore, although members are absolutely entitled to choose whether to take interventions, any intervention must be absorbed in the member’s allocated speaking time.

15:46

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I am pleased to be able to speak

in this important debate and to remind members that our oil and gas sector, while vital to the north-east, has played—and continues to play—an important role across my Highlands and Islands region.

Yesterday, if I had looked out of the window of my home overlooking Scapa Flow in Orkney, I would have seen the tanker Aretea berthed at the Flotta oil terminal, the Pacific Ineos Grenadier at anchor and the Eagle Balder and Pacific Treasures involved in a ship-to-ship transfer, supported by local tugs Freyja, Thor and Odin. I would also have seen the platform, the Safe Caledonia, which is now a familiar sight in Scapa Flow.

One of my earliest memories of Orkney, from 1979, is of an oil rig in Scapa Flow. That was at the start of the oil boom, and throughout the past four decades, the oil has flowed through Flotta, and the tankers, including some of the largest in the world, have been regular visitors.

The oil industry is a vital part of Orkney's economy, providing well-paid and highly skilled jobs and supporting a wider supply chain. It has gross value added of £110 million and supports 167 direct jobs and 279 indirect jobs, with those in turn supporting at least a further 175 local jobs in the islands. The supply chain includes many businesses that also support Orkney's growing renewables sector. The two highly skilled, highly successful industries work hand in hand, complementing each other, not in competition as some might have us believe.

Across the Highlands and Islands, according to Offshore Energies UK, the sector has GVA of £209 million and supports the jobs of more than 1,500 people. It was in the Highlands, at yards such as Ardersier, Kishorn and Nigg, that the oil boom was facilitated by building the rigs that extracted the oil. Cromarty Firth port has been and will continue to be a vital facility as the opportunities of the green freeport—created by both the UK and Scottish Governments working together—are taken.

The sector is vital to Shetland, where the Sullom Voe terminal and the Shetland gas plant are both still major employers, and where decommissioning at Lerwick Port Authority's Dales Voe facility is well established. It is a site that I have visited on a number of occasions.

The opportunities for Shetland, and for the wider Highlands and Islands, are not in the past. According to Wood Mackenzie's 2018 report, the west of Shetland is the "place to be", with abundant oil and gas reserves. There are opportunities for decades to come not just to support local jobs in Shetland and the wider sector

but to help the United Kingdom meet its energy needs.

That is vital, because oil and gas will continue to play a part of our energy mix for years to come. By ending domestic production early, we risk making the United Kingdom more reliant on more polluting foreign imports, and at a cost of £1,100 to every person by 2030. However, that seems to be a price worth paying for some in this chamber, who are desperate to be seen doing something virtuous regardless of the damaging consequences.

We know that the Green tail is now wagging the yellow SNP dog, and that it is now too feart to stand up to its militant Green bedfellows, or to stand up for Scotland's oil and gas workers. Labour has no such excuse. By talking up the ending of domestic production for good, Scottish Labour appears willing to let down the Scottish workers and the communities who depend on our oil and gas sector.

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the member give way?

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

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Scottish Labour is joined in its opposition to new developments by the Liberal Democrats, who are failing to stand up to those in the constituencies that they currently represent.

The Scottish Conservatives value our oil and gas sector and, with new opportunities in exploration, it can continue to play a vital role in the years to come. We will always stand up for the industry, the workers who rely on it for their employment and the communities that it supports.

15:50

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** For over half a century, our offshore energy sector has been an essential part of our economic and environmental prosperity. It has also ensured secure energy supplies across the UK.

However, in its "Just Transition Review of the Energy Sector", EY forecast a marked and continued decline in North Sea oil and gas production, with around 80 per cent of production coming from already sanctioned fields and less than 20 per cent from new developments. New discoveries will be smaller and harder to extract.

EY also reports that the industry supports 57,000 jobs in Scotland and is responsible for £16 billion of gross value added or 9 per cent of total Scottish gross domestic product. That contribution will reduce as the decline continues.

The term “just transition” refers to a fair distribution of burden and benefits of the transition to a low-carbon economy. It tends to be used in the context of workers. The 2021 “UK Offshore Energy Workforce Transferability Review” by Robert Gordon University highlights that “around 200,000 skilled people” are likely to be required to support activities in the UK offshore energy sector, and

“Over 90 per cent of the ... oil and gas workforce have medium to high skills transferability and are well positioned to work in adjacent energy sectors”.

Around 50 per cent of the jobs in the sector in 2030

“are projected to be filled by people transferring from ... oil and gas jobs to offshore renewables roles, new graduates and new recruitment from outside the existing UK offshore energy sector”.

I commend the Scottish Government’s support of the development of the skills passport that is proposed in the report.

The “Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan” sets out the future energy pathway for Scotland, including offshore wind. Earlier this week, I visited the Seagreen offshore wind farm, a joint venture that will deliver the world’s deepest fixed offshore wind farm later this year. In the 10 or so minutes that we were alongside a turbine being assembled, the nacelle—or cog—was lifted from the Wind Orca jack-up vessel on to the tower, demonstrating the pace of progress while, crucially, using not only a blended workforce but also recycled assets, including the Seagreen operations base, which had formerly been home to an oil and gas company in Aberdeen.

Of course, there is still much to do. The RGU Energy Transition Institute report “Making the Switch” highlights that to grow the industry in the north-east will require rapid, targeted investment. Getting that right has the potential to secure the region’s economy as a global energy hub. However, if we move too slowly, we risk a hard-hitting economic decline. I hear that concern on a regular basis in my engagement with the sector, and I agree that that must be avoided at all costs.

**Liam Kerr:** Will the member take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member has only a minute left.

**Audrey Nicoll:** There is absolutely no doubt about the Scottish Government’s commitment to net zero. I was pleased to hear the detail on that in the cabinet secretary’s contribution earlier in the debate; however, I still seek reassurance on timescales, as I set out earlier.

A debate on oil and gas cannot pass without reference to the hundreds of billions of pounds

that have flowed from the sector to the UK Treasury. It is deeply disappointing that, in the light of that enormous contribution, the UK Government chooses not to match the—

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

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member should just now be concluding. She has one second left.

**Audrey Nicoll:** —Scottish Government’s £500 million just transition contribution to the vital work of the sector.

To conclude, I fully support—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Nicoll, you will have to conclude because we have no time in hand at all.

**Audrey Nicoll:** —the Government’s amendment this afternoon.

15:54

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to follow Audrey Nicoll and to participate in the debate. I welcome the first part of Liam Kerr’s motion, which is about the Parliament recognising

“the vital role that oil and gas plays in Scotland’s energy mix and in supporting tens of thousands of Scottish jobs, particularly in the north east”.

Liam Kerr was right to speak about the demand and the need in part to control and service that demand. We know that, when people lose their power, it becomes a frightening experience for them—perhaps even more so in this day and age than it was back in the 1970s during the three-day week.

Let me help Liam Kerr with his request about the North Sea’s developing future. The North Sea will not be turned off today or tomorrow, or, indeed, in future decades, because of what is already out there. When I say “out there”, I am not talking about the stuff that sits under the ground; I am talking about the brilliance, imagination and entrepreneurial skills of the workers, supported by strong trade unions, who are fighting to ensure that they do not repeat history and go through what mining communities and industrial communities went through under Margaret Thatcher.

We have heard about the need to transition to green technology and a green-based economy. We need to do that for many reasons. First and foremost, it is because of the planet and the fact that we owe our young generation a future in which they can live, contribute and enjoy the good things that we have today without having to hand over too much.

**Neil Gray:** Martin Whitfield is doing an admirable job in performing a Scottish Labour reverse ferret on UK Labour's position that was pushed out. Does he regret the fact that Jonathan Reynolds said that UK Labour would stop new oil and gas production?

**Martin Whitfield:** I am grateful for that intervention, because good faith suggests that one should welcome interventions, as that is the purpose of debate. However, let us talk about the previous 13 years. Over the past few years in particular, we have seen rising energy prices and families concerned about how they heat their home and feed their household. That is the responsibility of two Governments—one that sits down south and one that sits in Scotland.

I am not going to go back on what Jonathan Reynolds has said, and nor will I apply the cliff edge that people have spoken about. The Labour Party, both north and south of the border, is here to defend our communities, and that includes how they get energy, where they get food and the quality of their housing. It is also about looking after the people who are currently working on oil rigs out in the North Sea and allowing them to transition to new, highly skilled jobs.

I compliment Neil Gray on his comment about the grid. We need to look at the fundamental supply of power across the United Kingdom, and we need to do it in a developing, logical and technological way. The Labour Party will invest in that approach and allow it. In previous debates, Neil Gray has rightly raised the number of energy projects that are stalled at the moment because they cannot connect to the grid. Our communities need a good power source.

In the incredibly short time that I have left, I will raise the point that I always raise in such debates, which is about the importance of the nuclear sector in providing a baseload for the power supply. Torness, in my region, has produced enough low-carbon electricity to save the equivalent of 84.8 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, which is like taking every passenger car off the road for more than a year.

15:59

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Burning fossil fuels is the biggest source of global carbon emissions. We have to tackle that to deliver net zero but, at the same time, there is no point in pretending that oil and gas will not be an important part of our economy for decades to come. The task then is not just to reduce demand; it is to ensure that the supply is as low as possible. That is the practical approach that gets us to net zero while protecting jobs and giving our communities a future.

Those of us with the privilege of representing the north-east know how important that is. The oil and gas sector supports about 90,000 jobs in Scotland, a significant proportion of which are in the north-east. Those jobs mean that people can provide for their families and spend their pay packets in local businesses, and they contribute to almost 10 per cent of Scotland's GDP. Attempts to fast-track an end to the sector will only inflict unnecessary harm on those workers, their communities and Scotland as a whole. That is why reducing demand must come alongside a just transition.

The renewables sector is one obvious route. A recent report from Robert Gordon University found that 90 per cent of oil and gas workers have medium to high skill transferability and are well placed to work in adjacent energy sectors. Therefore, I welcome the UK Government joining other North Sea nations in committing to quadrupling offshore wind generation by the end of the decade.

Decommissioning has great potential, too. The North Sea Transition Authority estimates that annual spend will rise to £2.5 billion per year over the next two decades. On top of that, there is the opportunity to recycle critical minerals, especially from renewables, back into the economy. That will all add up in helping to sustain jobs and supply chains.

However, oil and gas workers face barriers, such as difficulties in having their skills recognised in other sectors, the cost of retraining and the lack of information on opportunities to do so. Therefore, it is welcome that reskilling is one of the goals of the UK Government's North Sea transition deal, alongside efforts to help the oil and gas sector to reduce emissions. As I have noted previously, those efforts would be helped by electrifying oil and gas platforms, such as through tying them to offshore wind platforms. That would further lower the carbon intensity of North Sea production, which is already below the global average.

No one who is serious about net zero should be arguing for higher carbon imports—a policy that could actually spur greater output from more carbon-intensive basins. The public agrees; a recent poll found that 75 per cent of people want our demand to be met by domestic supply. The Greens do not agree, though; they want our oil and gas sector to be shut down as quickly as possible. The SNP is not far behind them, as it backs a presumption against new oil and gas projects. Labour has now joined those parties in being out of step with public opinion and environmental principles.

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

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

**Maurice Golden:** Instead, those parties should recognise that our oil and gas sector is part of the solution, with the likes of BP and Shell committing tens of billions of pounds to net zero initiatives. By working with them, we can unlock even more investment, cut emissions further and provide the secure future that workers need.

16:03

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Folk might be asking themselves why a South Scotland MSP is speaking in a debate about oil and gas, but it is relevant to highlight and make it clear that—*[Interruption.]* This is really serious. When we talk about a just transition, we should be clear that the north-east is not the only place that will be affected. I have constituents and friends in Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders who work in the oil and gas sector, so a just transition must include the south of Scotland, too.

More than that, a just transition means expanding renewable energy generation in other parts of Scotland, including in Dumfries and Galloway, which is already playing its part in that regard through onshore wind, solar, hydroelectric power from the Drax hydro scheme in Galloway, for example, and micro hydro schemes, including the one at Penpont.

**Liam Kerr:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Emma Harper:** I am sorry, but I am really short on time, so I will not take any interventions. These wee debates with four-minute speeches dinnae really give us enough time to do so.

Two weeks ago, at a Parliament drop-in, I heard that 40 per cent of homes in Dumfries and Galloway are off grid, so assisting in a just transition to renewable energy for heating houses is extremely important.

As we have heard, a just transition does not entirely eradicate the need for fossil fuels and petrochemicals. Eighty-seven per cent of our oil and gas is currently used for transport, electricity and heating, and only 40 per cent is used for plastic production. However, plastics are essential, and they include essential items such as heart valves and joint replacement components that are used in total hip and knee replacements. We need to be careful about how we manufacture our language when we talk about the just transition for other products.

That made me think about personal protective equipment—masks, aprons and gloves—that was used during the pandemic. That comes from our petrochemical industry's manufacturing, as well. I

ask the minister to reaffirm in closing that the Scottish Government recognises the diversity of oil and gas products, and that that recognition will continue to be part of the Scottish Government's approach.

Scotland is an energy-rich nation with significant renewable energy resources, a highly skilled workforce and innovative businesses across a globally renowned supply chain. Analysis shows that the number of low-carbon production jobs is estimated to rise from 19,000 in 2019 to 77,000 by 2050 as a result of the just energy transition. That means that there will be more jobs in energy production in 2050 than there are now. By continuing to make the most of our vast renewable energy resources, we can deliver a net zero energy system that also delivers a net gain in jobs in Scotland's energy production sector.

There is huge potential for Dumfries and Galloway to benefit from renewable energy investment, including through the potential of fixed or floating offshore wind technology at a site known as SW1 in the Solway Firth. The community development trust in Eyemouth in the east part of my region has visibly benefited from offshore wind development. The community saw £50 million of investment before a turbine was even placed on the seabed, and many highly skilled jobs were created.

I am interested in how the benefits that have been witnessed in Eyemouth could be replicated in Stranraer. Fifty million quid could potentially come to the community, and people could choose which projects could be developed before any fixed or floating turbines are even in the water. However, part of the issue is engaging with the communities to see how that can be achieved. The option of a potential framework for community engagement could be considered. I have had conversations with South of Scotland Enterprise and it is interested, as I am, in whether such a framework is worth pursuing.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude, Ms Harper.

**Emma Harper:** Scotland is ensuring a just transition.

I will close there, as time is short in the debate.

16:07

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Today's debate is, of course, on the most critical issue of our time. It is worth spelling out what the overwhelming scientific consensus says will be in store if we do not alter our ways of generating, using and exporting energy.

In March this year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published its final report in a

series of six reports. That was the culmination of nearly a decade of study by hundreds of researchers. It is brutally clear. It states:

“Every increment of global warming will intensify multiple and concurrent hazards”.

The clearest path to keeping global temperatures within safe limits is to rapidly phase out fossil fuels. The researchers say that that is needed in the near term, that renewable energy must be urgently prioritised, and that some of the consequences of not heeding that advice are “increasingly irreversible losses” across ecosystems on land and sea, increasingly insufferable heat in urban areas and in our oceans, and a starkly different future for our children and grandchildren. The scientists say that our climate’s future depends on our choices now and in the near term.

Scotland is not hiding from the seriousness of those choices. The Scottish Government’s draft energy strategy sets out a way forward.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government will no longer support unlimited recovery of fossil fuels. The development of the Cambo field has been halted, and the UK Government must now use its reserved powers to do the same for all new licences, including for Rosebank.

**Liam Kerr:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mark Ruskell:** I do not have time.

There is no long-term future in North Sea oil and gas. Research that was undertaken for the Scottish Government makes it clear that, under all scenarios, the North Sea is a rapidly maturing basin with little prospect beyond the middle of the century. A responsible Government and a responsible Parliament must grapple head on with that challenge and secure a well-managed, supported and just transition for all who work in the sector, and particularly for those communities in the north-east. That also means pushing ahead with site-specific just transition plans for Scotland’s largest industrial polluters, such as Mossmorran in Fife.

The decline in fossil fuels is irrefutable. Our choice now is whether to accept a slow withering of skills and expertise or to grasp the opportunity to maximise the expansion of jobs in renewables and all the supporting sectors. However, the Tories want us to ignore the writing on the wall for fossil fuels. The power over our future still lies in the hands of a UK Government that retains control of licensing and would prefer to sell out the north-east’s chance of a stable transition to maximise short-term shareholder profiteering.

There is no guarantee that an incoming Labour Government would be any better. Keir Starmer’s

support for banning new licences for oil and gas in the North Sea is very welcome, but Anas Sarwar has said that Labour might still allow the 500 million-barrel Rosebank field to go ahead. That is an impossible circle to square.

We lie at a critical juncture. Less than two years ago, we all united over COP26 in Glasgow, and we committed to keeping 1.5°C alive. From what I have heard in this debate, there is a consensus—at times an uneasy one—among four parties in the Parliament that we need to move beyond oil and gas and that we can do that in a just way that takes workers with us and puts them at the fore. The only outliers in the Parliament are the extremist Tories, who deny the reality of climate change. However, the time for urgent climate action is now. There is no credible long-term future in oil and gas, and it is our duty as politicians—credible politicians—to map out the alternative.

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

**Mark Ruskell:** The Scottish Greens will be taking that duty seriously.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Jackie Dunbar, who will be the last speaker in the open debate.

16:11

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** It might come as a surprise that I actually agree with some of the Conservative motion. I agree that

“the Parliament recognises the vital role that oil and gas plays in Scotland’s energy mix and in supporting tens of thousands of Scottish jobs, particularly in the north east”

and that it

“condemns Labour Party plans to ban new production from the North Sea”.

I agree as someone who lives and works in, and represents a part of, the oil capital of Europe. I know all too well the benefits that the industry has brought to my city, and I look forward to when it transitions to being the energy capital of Europe. We are all aware that, even though the major use of oil and gas is to generate energy, petroleum is used for many other essential everyday items, and that we will continue to need petroleum for our household products, beauty products, medicines, clothing, construction, furniture, electronics, agricultural products, healthcare and even children’s toys.

Deirdre Michie, the former chief executive of Oil & Gas UK, which later became Offshore Energies UK, said at the first meeting of the cross-party group on oil and gas that I attended that there will be a sweet moment when the use of renewables increases and oil and gas use reduces to a point



where both become equal. Ms Michie said that that is when we will experience a true transition, and I could not agree more. That is what we should all be working towards.

On the subject of a just transition, I want to ensure that the staff who have worked in oil and gas—as many of my family members have—are supported in a just way, should their employment in oil and gas cease. Scotland is an energy-rich nation, the oil and gas industry has made a vast contribution to our economy, and its workers are some of the most highly skilled in the world. However, Scotland's oil and gas basin is now a mature resource, and the Scottish Government is responsibly taking action to ensure that the sector and the community that it supports are supported in a transition to a cleaner, greener energy system. Our oil and gas workers and their vital skills are essential to the transition. Workers and trade unions must be at the heart of everything that the Scottish Government does.

Research from Robert Gordon University highlights that a majority of offshore workers could be delivering low-carbon energy by 2030 and that more than 90 per cent of the UK's oil and gas workforce have medium to high levels of skills transferability, which means that those workers are well positioned to work in adjacent energy sectors. RGU's "Making the Switch" report highlights the potential for the north-east region to become a net zero global energy hub that supports existing oil and gas roles into the renewables and low-carbon roles of the future.

On Monday, I visited the Seagreen offshore wind farm with my colleague Audrey Nicoll. I got chatting with a Windcat skipper, who was a fisherman prior to working in the renewables industry. He then went to work in oil and gas and then went back to fishing, and he is now working in the renewables sector. That is a just transition and a prime example of how easy it can be for skills to transfer.

The Scottish Government is absolutely committed to a just transition and to ensuring that we take workers with us on our journey to net zero. We need to take the sector with us and recognise that we will still require petroleum. Even though that requirement will lessen, we need to ensure that that is locally sourced. We should be in no doubt that it is the highly skilled workforce in the current oil and gas sector that will be best placed to transfer over to the renewables sector in a just and fair manner. They will be at the forefront of delivering our net zero targets.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the closing speeches. I call Daniel Johnson to wind up on behalf of Scottish Labour. You have up to four minutes, Mr Johnson.

16:15

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** There has been a pretty serious attempt to have a very divisive debate this afternoon, but I am nothing if not a consensual politician. I will therefore start by saying what I genuinely agree with the opening Conservative and Government speakers on.

Liam Kerr is absolutely right to say that the oil industry is a vital industry to Scotland. It is vital for the jobs and the income that it provides, but the oil itself is also vital. As other contributors have pointed out, it is vital not only as an energy source but as a critical raw material for pharmaceuticals, medical devices, dyes and many other products that we need in our day-to-day lives.

Indeed, that is exactly why we need to think very carefully about how we use the limited oil that we have left. As I pointed out in my intervention, we have extracted 75 per cent of our extractable oil resources. It is simply not possible to open the taps and continue the oil for ever. It is finite and it is going to end. Even without a climate crisis, that would be the reality that we would have to contend with.

I agree with Neil Gray that, as we face the inevitable transition, we must not abandon the workers and repeat the mistakes of the past. We have seen that time and again, especially in energy sectors. When we stopped using coal, we saw the miners plunged into penury. In the transition of heavy industries such as steel, we have seen utterly callous decisions from previous Tory Governments that left those skilled workers on the scrap heap. We cannot afford to do that.

The reality is that this debate is not about North Sea oil's past but about its future. As Liam McArthur said, change is unavoidable. The Tories came to the chamber today claiming that this was a debate about economic realities. Well, let me mention some of those. The Tories talk about being able to import oil, but the reality is that 60 per cent of our gas was exported last year, and 80 per cent of our oil. That fact does not stand up.

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

**Daniel Johnson:** I will, in a moment.

If it is about price, Greg Hands himself said that the volume of gas that we have simply would not impact global gas prices.

The Conservatives have also argued about resilience. I gently remind them which party it was that sold off the gasometers and reduced our gas storage to days while continental Europe held weeks if not months of supply. It was their Government and their decision, so I am afraid that their economic arguments are empty, devoid of any factual basis and without any context.

I am happy to take the intervention.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please be very brief, Mr Kerr.

**Liam Kerr:** In 2022, we imported almost £3 billion of oil and gas from Russia. Why would the member increase our exposure to that regime?

**Daniel Johnson:** Ultimately, those 16 billion barrels of oil are simply not enough to deliver continued supply to offset any of the impact on global prices that they claim. I am happy to go away and do a comparative fact check, but the reality of the figures that I have in front of me is that 60 per cent of our gas and 80 per cent of our oil was exported. I am happy to go away and compare those figures. *[Interruption.]*

However, that is not the only point. We have heard misquote after misquote. To use—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Excuse me, Mr Johnson. I say to members that we do not want sedentary chat across the benches.

Mr Johnson, I hope that you will be bringing your remarks to a close very soon.

**Daniel Johnson:** To use a phrase that might have inspired some of the political arguments this afternoon, there have been many aspects of fake news. There will not be an oil shut-down or turn-off. To quote Johnny Reynolds—I was in the room when he said this—we are going to continue to extract oil well into the 2050s. The debate is about North Sea oil's future, not its past. It is about 50,000 jobs and £28 billion of investment.

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

**Daniel Johnson:** We have a desperate motion from a desperate party that knows that it is on its way out.

16:20

**The Minister for Energy (Gillian Martin):** A just and planned energy transition not only will recognise the role that the oil and gas sector plays in Scotland but will seek to harness the expertise, investment capital and workforce in that sector. The contribution that the skilled oil and gas workforce makes to Scotland's present and future energy security is fundamental.

Right now is our opportunity. As Jackie Dunbar said, the sweet moment when we can bring stable employment and prosperity for generations to come is on the horizon. The north-east of Scotland is at the heart of that and it will remain our energy capital, but this time round there is even more potential for that prosperity to reach all over Scotland. Orkney is already leading the way, as

we heard from Liam McArthur and Jamie Halcro Johnston, and Emma Harper talked about some of the opportunities in the South Scotland region.

In his considered speech, Mark Ruskell said that oil and gas production will happen until at least the middle of the century. Along the road, there will be peaks and troughs in that. We already have a sense of the pressures that workers face from the survey of more than 500 workers that I launched while I was on the back benches and the survey that we did as part of the energy strategy engagement. Unions and interest groups are doing similar surveys as well.

We saw in 2016, in particular, what can happen to workers when the oil price dips. For many people I know in oil and gas—constituents, friends and neighbours—that was the second or third time that they had faced cliff-edge redundancy. With North Sea oil and gas fields maturing, it is getting harder and more costly to extract from them, and the workers know that their product is not as competitive as it once was. Those workers are looking to us to demonstrate the pathway to a more secure energy future that is not vulnerable to global politics or market shocks. Every householder who is trying to keep their home warm wants the same.

Transition is not a choice; it is a necessity. That is being demonstrated not just by Scottish Government policy, but by the business decisions that oil and gas companies are making, as Jackie Dunbar and Audrey Nicoll deftly demonstrated.

**Liam Kerr:** I respect a lot of the comments that the Minister for Energy is making. However, does she share my concern that, to date, the Scottish Government has created only 3,100 green jobs and that it does not have a definition of those green jobs or know where they are?

**Gillian Martin:** Those figures do not take into account the fact that our supply chain works across the oil and gas sector and renewables. We estimate that there will be 77,000 jobs in low-carbon energy by 2050. That is why we need planning. With that, we can absorb the 57,000 skilled oil and gas jobs and create a few thousand more. In fact, the challenge will be to find enough people who are skilled up and trained to service all the potential that we have in Scotland. I know where Mr Kerr is coming from, but the fact is that that is why we have to have a just transition plan in place.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

**Gillian Martin:** I will not.

We also need action by the UK Government, which holds key policy levers for delivering a net

zero future, including reform of the electricity markets; access to the electricity grid, which Martin Whitfield mentioned; and decarbonisation of the gas grid, which I asked Liam Kerr about. I was particularly interested to hear how much hydrogen he thinks the UK Government might put into that. A further lever is track 2 status for the Scottish cluster and the Acorn project, which I know my Scottish Conservative colleagues also want to see. The Climate Change Committee, which Liam McArthur mentioned, has said time and again that, unless we have carbon capture, usage and storage in Scotland, we will not meet our net zero targets.

People need to see our energy choices working for us. One thing that we should never see again is the UK Government squandering Scotland's energy wealth in the way that it did with our oil and gas revenues. Sarah Boyack was right to talk about community benefits. I am actively working with stakeholders on how we can make community benefits hit households in terms of their energy security.

Scotland already exports 20 terawatt hours of renewable electricity to the rest of the UK, and we have even more renewable energy potential. The process of meeting that potential will largely be powered by many of the people who are working in oil and gas.

Our focus must be on meeting our energy security needs, reducing emissions—

**Mercedes Villalba:** Will the minister give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister is in her last 20 seconds.

**Gillian Martin:** —and ensuring that we bring about a just transition for our oil and gas workforce. Our approach is pragmatic, realistic, responsible and worker focused. The Tories are not planning for the future. We are, and we will take the oil and gas workers with us.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Douglas Lumsden to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

16:25

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I feel honoured to be representing the people of the north-east in this debate and standing up for those jobs in the north-east. It is clear from this debate that only the Scottish Conservatives are offering clear, unambiguous support to our oil and gas industry and the north-east of Scotland.

The SNP-Green devolved Government is against oil and gas exploration in the North Sea and would rather that our energy needs were met

by imports from abroad, with supplies coming from places such as Russia. Its presumption against oil and gas exploration in the North Sea means that our oil and gas industry faces a cliff edge. The SNP-Green Government seems to be intent on taking Scotland apart brick by brick, rather than supporting business. The Government's tone-deaf response to the needs of our economy is risking our economic recovery and will have a direct impact on the money in the pockets of everyone in Scotland during the cost of living crisis.

Labour is no better. There are clear divisions on the policy in the party north and south of the border. In media interviews this week, Anas Sarwar was desperately back-peddalling, telling us that what Keir Starmer meant was different from what he actually said, but the oil and gas sector and people in the north-east will not be fooled.

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

**Douglas Lumsden:** I will later, if I have time.

The Labour position is a joke. It claims to want to support the oil and gas sector, but it will not allow new developments. It is a classic case of sitting on the fence as Labour tries to appease its friends at Just Stop Oil and the trade unions, which call its stance naive. Let me break the news to Labour members. Without any new developments, we will run out of hydrocarbons well before we need to, which will mean that we rely more on imports and have to throw thousands of jobs on the scrap heap.

Sarah Boyack does not understand that, but the GMB does, as does the head of Offshore Energies UK, who stated today:

"We are importing from countries where they do not necessarily have the same commitments to the climate goals that we have. We are exporting our jobs and we are leaving the country poorer as a result."

That is a result of the actions that other parties in the Parliament are taking.

As my colleagues have highlighted, the Scottish Conservatives are the only party with a clear message of support for our oil and gas sector and for the tens of thousands of workers and communities who rely on energy production for their livelihoods and wellbeing. We should make no mistake. While we still need to heat our homes, we will still need oil and gas. While we still have an inadequate electric charging infrastructure, we will still need oil and gas. While we still run 50-year-old diesel intercity 125s between our cities, we will still need oil and gas. While we still need oil and gas, it is better for our economy, our environment and our jobs that we produce it in this country.

**Daniel Johnson:** Will Douglas Lumsden give way?

**Douglas Lumsden:** I will come back to Daniel Johnson if I have time.

Liam Kerr made the excellent point that it is the energy companies that are using oil and gas income to pay for our energy transition through billions of pounds of investment—companies such as BP, Shell and Equinor. Audrey Nicoll and Jackie Dunbar mentioned the Seagreen wind farm, which they visited. That is being built in partnership with TotalEnergies, which is using income from oil and gas to build the energy of the future. That shows the importance of traditional oil and gas companies to our transition, which the cabinet secretary seems not to understand.

Jamie Halcro Johnston spoke well of the highly paid, highly skilled jobs that our economy so badly needs and the opportunities to the west of Shetland that will mean so much for the local community. We cannot just throw them away.

Audrey Nicoll mentioned the £500 million just transition fund, but she failed to mention the £16 billion from the UK Government North Sea transition deal. Gillian Martin talked about CCUS, in which the UK Government has invested more than £40 million while the Scottish Government has zeroed that budget.

We know that we need more investment in green energy production—that is one of the reasons why we are in favour of pursuing nuclear power—but we need to do that in partnership with industry by working with businesses instead of ignoring them, and we need to work with communities throughout the north-east to ensure that they lead on the issue, because they know best. If we do not listen to them, we will go down a path that will lead to job losses and economic decline in the north-east of Scotland.

I make it very clear that we support new oil and gas exploration in the North Sea while there is still a demand for hydrocarbons. We believe in a just transition for the creation of green jobs. We support funding for any oil and gas worker who wants to reskill in renewables. We support the 90,000 workers who depend on the sector. Finally, we are the only party that will support the towns, communities and people of the north-east of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate. There will be a short pause to allow front-bench teams to change positions before we move on to the next item of business.

## Tourism in Scotland

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-09340, in the name of Liz Smith, on prioritising Scottish tourism. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

16:31

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** We are remarkably privileged to live in the landscape of Scotland. The beauty of our dramatic scenery, the rich diversity of our culture, our history and ancient monuments and our sporting attractions are just some of the reasons why visitors want to come here. It is true that visitors can also encounter some difficulties—usually with the weather and the perennial challenge of our midges—but tourism is in our DNA. Not only is the sector essential to our global appeal; it is the prerequisite for rebuilding our economy and stimulating economic growth, which we desperately need, given the Scottish Government's current balance sheet, which the Finance and Public Administration Committee was scrutinising yesterday.

We should never forget that an overwhelming number of tourism enterprises are small businesses, like the Real Food Cafe in Tyndrum, whose owner was in touch with me this morning about the hospitality unlimited project. Small businesses are always the backbone of any economy; according to the most recent statistics, they make up 96 per cent of the sector. Make no mistake: the sector feels so badly let down because of the Scottish Government's failure to prioritise its needs, especially in rural and island areas.

A couple of months ago, Marc Crothall, the chief executive officer of the Scottish Tourism Alliance, said:

"The industry is experiencing the double whammy from inflation and the policy pain that is adding costs which could put many out of business altogether."

He went on to say:

"This is entirely the wrong time for the Scottish Government to be piloting policies that will do limited good and risk maximum harm."

At the weekend, in *The Herald*, the owner of a self-catering cottage in the Western Isles—who was previously a member of the Scottish National Party, apparently—denounced what he described as "the perfect storm" of SNP policies that could potentially mirror the demographic consequences of the Highland clearances.

**Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** Liz Smith listed a number of things in her motion that she says are down to the SNP. Does she have any space in that list for energy costs, interest rate rises, inflation or the effects of Brexit—or do those not matter?

**Liz Smith:** I say to Mr Brown that I am on record as having spoken several times about the effect of Brexit and the difficulties of the labour supply, but I will not take any lectures from a Scottish Government that refuses to address the point that, despite the healthy increase in migration to the UK, Scotland is hardly seeing any benefit, which begs the question why people will not come here in the first place.

Let us examine the elements of that perfect storm. I will start with infrastructure. The Caledonian MacBrayne ferry disruptions and subsequent cancellations have caused between a 30 per cent and a 50 per cent reduction in accommodation bookings for most of our islands, including Mull, Iona, Arran, Lewis, Harris and South Uist—the list goes on. Ferry disruption has played a major part in disrupting the tourism industry. I am sure that that is exactly why Alasdair Allan quite rightly questioned the First Minister last week about the serious implications of those cancellations.

There were demonstrations at Lochboisdale last weekend, with business leaders furious that there will be no compensation from the Scottish Government for all the disruption.

Then there are the significant issues on the A9 and the A96 and the broken promises regarding the dualling of those critical road networks—already the subject of so many debates and questions in this chamber. I am not sure where Richard Lochhead is today, but if he wants to hear about the long-term effects of that at first hand, he does not have to listen to just my Conservative colleagues, who have been assiduous in highlighting the dangers for many months, and perhaps years; he can listen to his own constituents, to Highland Council, to Transport Scotland and of course to his own colleagues Fergus Ewing and Emma Roddick, who know exactly what the effects are, not just for safety but for tourism across the whole Highland region. Other countries do not have to put up with such blight on their infrastructure and connectivity and it is high time that the SNP-Green Government recognises just how damaging the effects have been.

However, it is not just the weak infrastructure and connectivity that are causing problems. A third of Scottish Tourism Alliance representatives have cited the short-term lets licensing policy as the biggest challenge. The alliance has criticised the SNP-Green Government for failing to recognise

the knock-on effects of self-caterers giving up their properties and leaving them lying empty on local employment and on the sustainability of small rural communities. In Edinburgh, eye-watering fees are being charged ahead of the festival and the fringe, undermining the availability of accommodation.

All of that is happening when businesses are having to cope with inflation, high energy costs and the fallout from the Scottish Government's chaotic deposit return scheme. The UK Short Term Accommodation Association said that the introduction of the scheme could have lasting and damaging effects on Scotland's tourism economy. On top of that, local authorities will have the power to introduce a visitor levy. UK Hospitality Scotland said that the introduction of the levy would leave so many hospitality businesses frustrated, yet again, by other costs coming to a sector that is so much in difficulty—

**The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Liz Smith:** I will not just now, if the cabinet secretary does not mind.

That is making Scotland uncompetitive in relation to the rest of the UK—something that we already know is happening with general taxation.

Fiona Campbell of the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers condemned the visitor levy being introduced at a time when the sector was already being hit by what she described as a "juggernaut of regulation". It is that combination of regulation and red tape, of increased costs and the failure of the Scottish Government to match the 75 per cent business rates relief that was awarded in the rest of the UK—despite it having the Barnett consequential to do so—that is causing so much concern.

We know, too, that, along with several other sectors, tourism has made very well known its views about the general anti-business agenda of the SNP and the Greens, although I think that the current minister is trying to address some of that. The Scottish Chambers of Commerce warned that the combined effect would be that Scotland would become

"a less attractive place to live and work".

The minister would also be well advised to listen to the concerns of the Economy and Fair Work Committee, which wrote to the Scottish Government during the pre-budget process to say that tourism has suffered a cut in cash terms from £51.2 million down to £49.4 million at the very time when many new tourism enterprises in Scotland have the lowest survival rate.

I return to my original point: a strong tourism sector should be at the heart of Scotland's DNA

but, with this Scottish Government, that is very far from being the case. I know that Richard Lochhead likes to tell us that he is the minister for tourism, but the sector feels otherwise; it feels perplexed that his role has been subsumed into the more general portfolio of small business and innovation.

I call on the Scottish Government to look at the whole issue again—it needs a blueprint to address deep-seated concerns.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the tourism sector is a crucial element in the future sustainability of the Scottish economy; regrets the SNP-Scottish Green Party administration's failure to prioritise tourism, and the weaknesses in Scotland's infrastructure with the resulting detrimental effect on connectivity across rural and island areas, including failures in ferry services and the delay in progressing the dualling of both the A9 and the A96; notes the concern amongst the hospitality sector about the introduction of a visitor levy; condemns the flawed short-term lets policy and an anti-business agenda, which has resulted in additional costs and red tape for those across the tourism sector, and calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward an urgent blueprint to address the deep-seated concerns of the tourism sector and its related industries.

16:38

**The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray):** As cabinet secretary for the wellbeing economy and as a proud Orcadian, I simply do not recognise the picture of Scottish tourism that the Conservatives, through Liz Smith, have just attempted to paint. The Government's track record on tourism is one of unwavering support, and rightly so, as tourism is a jewel in the crown of Scotland's economy, driving growth, creating employment and showcasing the beauty of our nation, our history and our culture to the rest of the world—as Liz Smith rightly outlined at the start of her speech. I assure members that our Government recognises the significance of tourism and remains committed to supporting and fostering its success.

First, let me address the claim at the end of Liz Smith's speech that the SNP-Green Government lacks a dedicated tourism minister. Although ministerial titles change, our responsibilities are absolutely set. Placing tourism at the heart of the responsibility of the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade—Liz Smith recognised that the majority of tourism businesses are small businesses—demonstrates and strengthens the sector's position, rather than diminishing it.

**Liz Smith:** Why, then, is the tourism sector complaining that it is perplexed that there is no dedicated tourism minister?

**Neil Gray:** I have regularly spoken to Marc Crothall and others in the sector and have reassured them. Richard Lochhead's engagement with the sector since his appointment as minister would have confirmed that reassurance. However, it is not just Richard Lochhead who is leading energetically on that front; other ministers across Government, including me in the Cabinet, are also engaged in tourism matters. We are pooling our expertise and resources in order to drive the industry forward. All signs suggest that that approach is working.

The most recent figures from the Office for National Statistics, which were released last week, show that there were 3.2 million visits to Scotland from overseas visitors last year compared with 3.46 million visits over the same period in 2019. That recovery in demand outpaces the rest of the UK, where the comparable figure remained 25 per cent below the 2019 figure. I will repeat that, because I think that it confirms the strength of our approach in Scotland. Recovery elsewhere in the UK in 2022 was 25 per cent below 2019 numbers, whereas in Scotland, it was 7 per cent below. Furthermore, the figures show that spending from overseas visitors in Scotland has recovered to pre-pandemic levels, with spend of £3.2 billion in 2022 in the tourism sector. That is up 24 per cent in nominal terms on pre-pandemic levels. That is important, because our tourism strategy, "Scotland Outlook 2030: Responsible Tourism For A Sustainable Future", is focused on tourism as a force for good, and encouraging visitors to linger longer and contribute more. Our strategy has social, economic and environmental sustainability at its core.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Neil Gray:** I am sorry. My time is tight.

There are also promising signs that 2023 will be another great year for Scottish tourism, with numerous businesses already experiencing strong bookings and increased investment flow into the sector. This year, new direct air routes will be introduced and there is a line-up of unmissable events, such as the highly anticipated cycling world championships. All indications point to another successful year ahead for Scotland's vibrant tourism industry. However, we are not complacent and will keep pedalling hard for success with the tourism industry for the people and businesses that are involved and the sector's contribution to economic growth in Scotland.

Championing a vibrant tourism sector is at the heart of our national tourism strategy, which remains highly relevant and influential, even after the experiences of the past three years. The strategy was developed in close collaboration with the sector, ensuring that it reflects our shared

ambition to position Scotland as a global leader in 21st-century tourism. To drive that vision, we have established the tourism and hospitality industry leadership group. Its purpose is to provide strategic direction and ensure the successful implementation of Scotland's tourism strategy, "Outlook 2030". Under the co-chairmanship of the minister, Richard Lochhead, and the Scottish Tourism Alliance's chief executive, Marc Crothall, the ILG will act as a unifying force to guide the industry towards recovery, sustainable growth and excellence. It will ensure that the tourism industry is at the forefront of our wellbeing economy.

That said, many of the most pressing challenges that the sector faces lie outwith the powers that are available to us. Keith Brown made a salient intervention. An industry survey that was published on 29 May shows that high energy costs, the need to cut VAT, the impact of high inflation and the impact of Brexit on labour shortages are all key issues facing the sector—the industry has said that itself. We will continue to call on the UK Government to use its reserved powers in a manner that supports, rather than hampers, Scottish tourism.

**Murdo Fraser:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Neil Gray:** I am sorry. I am in my final minute.

In conclusion, I strongly reject the Opposition's claim that the Government is doing anything other than supporting our Scottish tourism industry. Of course, there are challenges, not least ferry maintenance, which I recognise. However, our Government has consistently prioritised the tourism sector. It recognises the importance of tourism to our economy and the wellbeing of our communities and has made strategic investments in marketing, infrastructure and workforce. We have listened to the concerns of residents, businesses and industry experts and we have taken decisive steps to address them. We have seen positive results, with increased visitor numbers, economic growth, benefits for communities and enhanced international reputation. We are actively engaged in fostering the growth and success of the sector, and will continue to work with it and our partners to develop a comprehensive blueprint for the future, ensuring that Scotland remains an attractive, welcoming, prosperous destination for visitors from around the world, and realising our shared ambition to confirm Scotland as a world leader in 21st-century tourism.

I move amendment S6M-09340.2, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert:

"welcomes the role that Scotland's world-class tourism offering plays in creating jobs, sustaining communities and enhancing appreciation of the outstanding natural environment and cultural assets right across the country;

notes that there were an estimated 3.2 million overseas visits to Scotland in 2022, which is only 7% lower than in 2019, whereas the comparable figure for the rest of the UK remained 25% below 2019; further notes that the proposed legislation for a visitor levy will provide local authorities with the powers to raise additional revenue if they choose and that revenue will be invested in improving services, with benefit for both visitors and the wider community in their area, further strengthening Scotland's tourism offer; considers that energy costs, the need to cut VAT, the impact of high inflation and the impact of Brexit on labour shortages are the key issues facing the Scottish tourism sector; calls on the UK Government to use its reserved powers in a manner that supports rather than hampers Scottish tourism, and notes that all the signs are that 2023 will be a successful year for Scotland's tourism sector."

16:45

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):**

I thank Liz Smith and the Conservatives for lodging the motion for debate, because the issue is critically important. Tourism is a hugely important industry for the whole of this country, and its impacts go far beyond the associated revenues that can be seen in the narrow economic analysis that one might initially look to.

I say to the minister that this need not be a contentious debate, because Liz Smith has raised a number of points that are important to the industry and need to be resolved. Even if one does not accept Liz Smith's characterisation of all the points—some of which I accept and some of which I do not—they need to be addressed. That is very much the tenor that I will adopt in my speech.

I was not going to comment on this issue, but I will say, with regard to having a dedicated tourism minister, that names matter, and that although it might seem superficial having "Tourism" in a minister's title, it sends a message to the industry. I just make that point very gently.

Overall, the reason why I think that the issue is important is that Scotland has a unique advantage in respect of our brand. We have assets in this country in its geography, people and culture. They are what draw tourists here, but they are actually part of something much larger. We have a reputation and renown around the world that not only draw in tourists but mean that we do not need to introduce ourselves. People know Scotland and they know the things that are associated with it. People are always interested when we say that we are from Scotland. We also have produce and provenance that are the envy of others.

However, all of that has not been brought together in a coherent way—that is what we lack and it is what we must all collectively focus on. Other countries have done that more successfully. When we think of Ireland, California, France or Tuscany, we see that those places have a recognisable combination of place, produce,

reputation, people and culture. We need to emulate such places. We can do that because we have the necessary elements. Not only would that benefit tourism, but the tourism itself would act as a calling card for all our other economic interests.

We should be in no doubt that tourism is a vital element of our economy. We need only look around the streets of Edinburgh to see the vibrancy and revenue that tourism brings. It employs 209,000 people—8 per cent of employment in Scotland. It accounts for 479,000 visits to Scotland. That figure includes not only international tourists but domestic tourists. There are 13.6 million overnight stays by people from within the UK, and 60 million day visits. Those are vital elements of our tourism economy.

We need to concentrate on supporting the industry, which has been hugely impacted by Covid, and many business owners who were genuinely worried about whether they would survive the pandemic have been hit by the cost of living crisis. Frankly, everyone who runs a kitchen is facing a huge barrier to the continued viability of their business, with bills increasing fivefold, sixfold or sevenfold. Even despite the recent declines in cost, the fact that for those businesses the cost of utilities has gone from a few per cent of their running costs to 10 or 20 per cent represents an unsustainable situation for many of them.

We also need to consider taking specific policy measures. I think that we need to revisit the issue of non-domestic rates. For hospitality businesses, non-domestic rates act as a disincentive for investment, so we must address that.

I understand Liz Smith's concerns about the visitor levy, but I disagree with her—I never notice paying it. However, we need to ensure that the money that the levy raises is reinvested in the quality and fabric of our tourist centres.

We must also urgently revisit the short-term lets issue. I supported tackling the numbers when the issue was last addressed. In my constituency, Airbnb registrations number some 3 per cent of all addresses. However, what was brought in was burdensome and unnecessary regulation of something that was not a problem. Licensing was tackling not the number but the standards of short-term lets. No one was talking about that before. It was unnecessary legislation, in which the tail ended up wagging the dog. I believe that my colleague, Jackie Baillie, will address that further.

Ultimately, the points that Liz Smith raised around transport are vital. People can come here but, frankly, our tourism industry will struggle if those people cannot get to other parts of the country, to the islands or up the road because the ferries are not running, the roads are not adequate, the trains are not frequent enough or air

routes do not exist. Although there has been some improvement, Glasgow airport is still significantly down in terms of the number of intercontinental routes.

I very much support today's debate, but we need to help the tourism industry to embrace the future, and that is what my amendment seeks.

I move, as an amendment to motion S6M-09340, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"understands that the economic crisis and cost of living are impacting the tourism industry at a time when it is still recovering from previous shocks; notes with concern the flaws in the Scottish Government's short-term lets policy and the issues raised by businesses in the tourism sector; recognises the need for a more joined-up and proactive economic strategy, which takes into account the reality that Scottish retail, tourism and leisure businesses are operating in, including an assessment of the impact of existing Scottish Government policy decisions on the sector, and calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward an urgent blueprint to address the concerns of business in the tourism sector and related industries."

16:50

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** That was quite an impressive all-round tour of the various issues of the tourism industry. Daniel Johnson's contribution was in the tenor in which we should approach the debate: there is no doubt that there are some successes, but there are some really big challenges, and there are lessons for the Scottish Government as well as for the UK Government.

I will cover some of those lessons but, first, I will pay tribute to the tourism sector. It has evolved dramatically over recent decades—from castles, golf, distilleries and festivals, to food towns and book towns, to long-distance travel routes, to conference tourism—which has really taken off—to film locations in places such as Falkland in my constituency, which has the "Outlander" tour, to mountain biking. I visited the mountain bike world cup in Fort William last week. I thank goodness that I am not doing that kind of sport, but it was really impressive, and I am looking forward to the world championships, which will show off all the different parts of Scotland.

Cruise ships have dramatically changed the nature of our tourism offer, and businesses are cropping up in order to meet that demand. There are also new venues, such as the V&A Dundee and the great tapestry of Scotland, which I visited in Galashiels just last week.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Willie Rennie:** I am sorry—I have only a short amount of time.



All those things are fantastic, and they are a great tribute to the sector's entrepreneurs, who are great assets. However, sometimes the Government does not really help. I am afraid that there has been an utterly devastating effect on the ferries. I give credit to the Government for the road equivalent tariff, because when I visited the Western Isles I saw for myself the real benefit that it has brought to the islands. However, the islands have been walloped and their businesses have been decimated. We saw the anger at Lochboisdale at the weekend, where business for June has, in effect, just evaporated, which is terrible treatment of what is quite a fragile community.

**Liz Smith:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Willie Rennie:** I am sorry—I have only a short time.

Lochboisdale is a very fragile community, so the Government really must understand—we will cover this tomorrow—that it needs to come up with compensation, or all the gains that the RET has brought to the islands will just be wiped away.

It is beyond me why Historic Environment Scotland is taking so long to survey buildings in order to get those great assets opened again. I cannot understand it. I know the arguments about the need to put safety first, but the work has taken so long to get sorted.

The failure to dual the A9 and A96 is an insult to the Highlands. They have been promised that repeatedly for decades, but we still have not got there, so we need to sort that.

Toilets are really important and undervalued. We do a big survey every new year and, in 2007, there were 521 public toilets. I was devastated to hear that the number dropped to 355 last year. We can just imagine how elderly tourists are feeling. They are bursting to get to the toilet, but it is closed because the Government has not funded local government sufficiently to keep those buildings open.

The north coast 500 route is a great and fantastic development, but the locals feel really irritated by the state of the roads and the lack of public toilets and camping sites. Of course, they welcome the economic boost, but the Government has not really matched all that tremendous potential with appropriate support.

I have concerns about short-term lets, as Daniel Johnson has, and I have a nuanced position on the visitor levy, but there is a lesson for the Conservative UK Government—it cannot really complain about difficult economic conditions when it allowed Liz Truss to be in charge of the budget and had a really damaging Brexit.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind all members that they need to press their request-to-speak button in order to be called to speak.

16:55

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a director of a small hospitality business in the Borders.

Every year, we hear the SNP promise improved relationships with Scotland's business community—a great reset of Government economic policy—but it goes nowhere. Sturgeon, Yousaf and the SNP have pursued the same anti-business agenda. If the SNP values Scottish tourism and all the jobs and businesses that it supports, it has a very funny way of showing it. It is making Scottish tourism businesses pay more tax than businesses south of the border; it is introducing more red tape and more regulation; and it is even making it harder for tourists to visit parts of Scotland by leaving major roads in the Borders and the north-east uninvested in.

We have heard about no investment and island communities without ferries. Beyond the purchase of a campervan, the SNP has done very little for Scottish tourism. It did not even use the campervan. Perhaps the Greens fancy a one-way trip in it. As *The Economist* said,

“the country's political class has been on a long holiday”,

but not in a campervan, clearly.

**Bob Doris:** Will the member give way?

**Rachael Hamilton:** On the campervan? Not just now, thank you.

In the past, we could address some of those concerns to the Scottish Government tourism minister. Now there is no such post; tourism has been demoted to a small footnote at the end of somebody else's responsibilities. Therefore, it is somebody else's problem.

**Bob Doris:** Will the member give way?

**Rachael Hamilton:** No, thanks.

That is a disappointing approach, because tourism is an integral part of Scotland's economy. Before Covid hit, the tourism sector accounted for one in every 11 jobs. Such jobs are really important to rural communities, including those in my constituency in the Borders. On Monday, it was a pleasure to visit an agritourism business, Bairnkine farm, which is diversifying, developing its farm cottages and employing people. It is also giving walking trails to people who are visiting the area.

I also visited the River Tweed Commission. We know how important salmon fishing is to the River Tweed. One of the employees said:

“Kelso is to salmon angling what St Andrews is to golf”.

Whether it is a river, a farm or a natural asset, these fantastic events, attractions and natural assets are so important to rural areas.

However, the tourism sector is succeeding on its own, in spite of the SNP Government. While enterprises elsewhere in the UK benefit from 75 per cent rates relief, the SNP chooses not to match that relief for Scottish businesses. While other Governments try to attract visitors, the SNP wants to bring in a tourism tax to hike the price of accommodation during a cost of living crisis. While Scotland’s tourism industry gets back on its feet after Covid, the SNP has brought in harmful short-term lets legislation.

**The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur):** Will the member take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member has 50 seconds left, so it would have to be very brief.

**Tom Arthur:** I am happy not to make the intervention.

**Rachael Hamilton:** That legislation is another SNP policy that, according to the Scottish Tourism Alliance,

“will do limited good and risk maximum harm.”

The SNP will drive tourists and the jobs that they support away from Scotland with their hardline anti-business agenda.

The Government needs to stop talking about a reset with Scottish businesses and get on with it. It can begin by abandoning short-term lets legislation, scrapping the tourism tax, providing Scottish businesses with the same support as elsewhere in the UK, ditching the independence minister, bringing in a tourism minister and producing an urgent blueprint to support Scotland’s tourism sector.

16:59

**Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** I was delighted to see that tourism was to be discussed in the chamber, and then I saw the motion. It is a misleading attempt to score political points at the expense of one of Scotland’s most important sectors. It starts off with a false assertion and continues to cherry pick problems and pretend that there can be simplistic solutions to complex issues.

Worse still, what we have heard ignores energy bills, interest rates, the impact of inflation and—

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The ferries are not operating.

**Keith Brown:** Was that an intervention?

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Yes.

**Keith Brown:** On you go.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** How important does the member think the ferries are for our island communities and other rural communities? Does he take responsibility for his Government’s utter failure to deliver the two ferries and the impact that that is having?

**Keith Brown:** I am not in the Government. I have two words: Chris Grayling. He awarded £14 million to a ferry company that had no ferries.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Will the member take another intervention?

**Keith Brown:** No—I have only four minutes.

Two years ago, the Tories promised to improve ferry service to the Isles of Scilly. They have not even put that out to tender.

Trying to ignore the real impact of energy costs, interest rates, inflation and Brexit on the tourism industry is the real hardline anti-business agenda that has been spoken about before.

In my constituency, the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal will see the Scottish Government invest £15 million to enhance the cultural, heritage and tourism offering, aiming to attract even more people from across Scotland, the UK and the world to our spectacular region.

The Scottish Government’s tourism strategy was laid out in March 2020—the month that the pandemic hit hard. This morning, I heard Steve Barclay, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, say that the huge waiting lists in the national health service in England were due to the pandemic, which affected every Administration around the world. We hear no mention of that from the Scottish Conservatives. This is not a serious motion about the tourism industry in Scotland.

The figures show that the sector is recovering well—it is returning to the positive growth figures that we were seeing before the pandemic. The Scottish quarterly gross domestic product index for sustainable tourism, which plummeted during the pandemic, is now back to pre-pandemic levels and moving in an upwards trajectory. Indeed, employment in the sector increased by 10.6 per cent over the latest year.

It is worth mentioning employment. We used to get a monthly bulletin from Murdo Fraser celebrating every time the UK outperformed Scotland’s rate of employment, but he has not said

a word for the past few months as Scotland has outperformed the UK in relation to the rates of employment, economic activity and unemployment.

There is no room for complacency, but there is no place for a doom-laden pronouncement either. It is the usual from the Conservatives: they are talking Scotland down.

The A9 was mentioned. The first priority of the Tory party, as of the Labour Party—this was certainly the case when I joined this Parliament—was to vote for £500 million to be spent on the trams in Edinburgh. That was their priority, not the A9 or the A96, which this Government has progressed. What we inherited from previous Labour and Tory Governments was in an abysmal state.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Keith Brown:** I have said that I am not taking any more interventions.

The fact is that some parts of that route present some severe engineering challenges. Everyone knows that, especially those who use it.

What has not been mentioned? The investment in the Aberdeen western peripheral route; the Borders railway line, which is the longest rail extension in the UK for 100 years; and the Queensferry crossing. As Willie Rennie mentioned, RET had a massive impact in parts of the country, too.

The two biggest on-going barriers to growth for the tourism economy in Scotland are entirely of the Tories' making, and they should be facing up to that. The first is the fall-out from the failings of its disastrous economic policies—we have heard about Liz Truss. The second is the effect of Scotland being dragged out of the European Union against our wishes, ending freedom of movement, making it harder for visitors to come here and causing major employment headaches for many sectors, particularly, it must be stressed, the hospitality sector. The Tories are the ones who are undermining the tourism industry in Scotland. Their motion should have at least acknowledged that.

17:03

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I recognise the serious shocks and challenges that our tourism industry has overcome and is having to overcome. From the pandemic to the subsequent financial pressures, it has been an extremely tough time, and we must give the tourism sector the reassurance that it requires.

I wish to look at the reality for many working in the tourism sector. It is one of low pay, inconvenient hours and poor conditions. Despite the efforts of some, such as Living Wage Scotland and many in the industry, the uncertainty that the pandemic brought will live long in the memory of those impacted. The abrupt end to employment, people living in fear about when the next pay packet might arrive and concerns about whether food could be put on the table were too much for some. We know that many did not return—that is understandable, because the sector often feels a bit like that all the time.

If we want a thriving tourism sector, we need to support a well-paid workforce and we need to value the skill and effort that so many put into ensuring that the sector continues to survive.

I note from the cabinet secretary's self-congratulatory amendment that he takes no responsibility for the Government's inaction in this area. He is right to attack the Tories for their reckless decision making, their dismal management of the economy and their failure to address problems that are linked to labour shortages. However, the reality is that the Scottish Government has failed to connect our rural areas to our international and regional transport hubs, and it has cut the budgets of local authorities, meaning that it is increasingly challenging to invest in local sites that are of interest to Scots and tourists alike. Scotland's tourism sector has two Governments that are letting it down: a reckless Tory one at Westminster and an often incompetent SNP one here at Holyrood. Scotland needs change.

I look to the historic area of Ayrshire, in my South Scotland region, and I look at the beaches, the castles and the museums. I love the fact that Willie Rennie brought in some of the other aspects of tourism such as food, culture and cycling. Those places are loved and visited by many, but they are inaccessible to so many others because of the poor connectivity and transport links and the investment that is needed at local community levels.

We are incredibly lucky to have so many historic sites in villages, towns and cities. We have a country with sites of interest at every corner. We have a brand, and we do not need to market it—it is there—but we are falling short of the mark when it comes to supporting the communities that support tourism if we do not offer strong career prospects in the sector and boost that essential connectivity.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the importance of properly supporting our rural college sector, to show that we truly prioritise our rural tourism sector where much of the training for that sector takes place. Last month, I had the honour

of visiting the Borders College Newtown St Boswells campus, where I heard staff and students alike express the severe and desperate challenges that colleges face, particularly in rural areas. When it is combined with the challenges that are linked to labour shortages, the Scottish Government's inaction as our tourism sector in rural areas is crying out for skills is apparent. Those colleges can help our rural areas boost our tourism sector.

It is right that we debate this topic this evening. As I mentioned, I understand the cabinet secretary's will to focus on the shocking policies and decisions of the Tory Government at Westminster. There is no doubt that its actions are having a direct impact on our tourism sector. However, the Scottish Government consistently fails to recognise its own role in the challenges that many sectors in Scotland face. It fails to invest in local authorities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude, Ms Mochan.

**Carol Mochan:** Scotland needs change. It needs change now.

17:07

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I declare an interest in that I jointly own a fishery on the river Spey that relies on tourism and contributes to the £20 million that is generated by fishing on Speyside alone.

Scotland has a great story to tell when it comes to tourism. We have a sector that contributes £4.5 billion to our economy, that accounts for one in 11 jobs and that sees visitors spend over £1 billion on eating and drinking as well. That is the good news.

Only a fool would kill the goose that lays the golden egg. That is what we seem to be seeing this afternoon, and it is extremely dangerous. We seem to be hearing from industry that things are going badly wrong. We have heard from the chief executive of the Scottish Tourism Alliance that Government policies

"will do limited good and risk maximum harm".

Why would you do that? Why would anyone do that?

Some of the failings that we have heard about this afternoon are quite interesting. We have talked about transport. We have some great destinations up in the Highlands and Islands, and we would love people to come and visit them, but they cannot. Why? Because there are no ferries, or the ferries are delayed, or they are broken down, or there is booking chaos.

I am really interested that Keith Brown is sitting at the back of the chamber and will not comment

on the ferries when he is one of the people who contributed to the fact that 801 and 802 were not delivered on time. What islanders would say to Mr Brown is, "Shame on you," because they are losing out.

**Keith Brown:** Does the member accept that there has been more investment in ferries by this Government than by any previous Government? *[Interruption.]* Does he accept that the Government that he supports gave £14 million to a ferry company that had no ferries?

**Edward Mountain:** What I will accept is that the last new ferry that was delivered to the Scottish ferry fleet was in 2015. For goodness' sake, we are eight years on. We need some new ferries. Get on with it. We were promised them in 2016.

I know of businesses across the Highlands and Islands that are already cutting their commitments for 2024. About 10 per cent of them are wondering whether they should stop being in business. A lot of businesses are getting cancellations from repeat customers because they cannot guarantee that they will be able to arrive on time—what a sorry state of affairs that is.

We have heard briefly about the A9. I will not reiterate all the points, but I travel on the road twice a week, as I come down to Parliament and go back home on it. Tourists who use the A9 to get up to or around the Highlands will be as shocked as I am when I drive on it, not only by the potholes but by the driving and the standard of the road, which are extremely poor. In 2007, we were promised that we would get a new A9, but it still has not been delivered.

I will touch briefly on short-term lets. We have discussed those and the Government has legislated on them. That is a really bad idea in the Highlands and Islands, because we rely on short-term lets to get tourists to come to the area and spend money in the local economy. The local authority has been tasked with sorting out the licensing scheme, but it has dealt with only about one fifth of the applications that it has received. Since March this year, some applications in Highland Council have been put on hold because the process is too difficult to deliver. *[Interruption.]*

If the cabinet secretary wants to stand up and tell me that I am wrong, he should do that. If not, I would suggest—

**Neil Gray rose—**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You are about to conclude, Mr Mountain.

**Edward Mountain:** Oh—I am in my last minute. I am sorry, cabinet secretary.

As well as the problem with short-term lets, which I am happy to discuss later with the cabinet

secretary, the idea of a tourism tax has been raised. A tourism tax will not work. The reason why it works in Europe is that there is a lower rate of VAT there.

In summary, I say to the Government: please do not kill the goose that lays the golden egg. That is exactly what it is doing at the moment.

17:11

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** I am delighted to speak in this debate on the hugely important tourism sector. It is important to recognise that the sector is, in effect, part of Scotland's export economy, as it contributes to Scotland's significance in the world and projects our culture, values and what we have to offer. The sector is also a huge contributor to inward investment and exports in other sectors, not least our hugely vibrant food and drink sector. The centrality of the tourism sector to Scotland's economy is significant.

It has been great to see the rebound of the sector post-Covid and that it is in a better shape than the sector across the rest of the UK. Willie Rennie's world tour of Scotland was great. He talked about traditional and new offerings in the sector as it continues to modernise. At the heart of that success has been a Government-industry collaboration and partnership that stretches back to before my time as a minister, when Fergus Ewing was a minister, and perhaps before that. I pay tribute to Fergus for working with the sector to bring forward the "Scotland Outlook 2030: Responsible tourism for a sustainable future" strategy, which the whole sector has coalesced behind. People in the industry talk about the strategy relentlessly and everybody is focused on delivering all aspects of it for people, places, businesses and memorable experiences.

It is great to hear that the Government is carrying on with the work of the industry leadership group. The setting up of that group has allowed the sector to coalesce and take forward the strategy with some really serious thinking and work on how to deliver it in the future. I am delighted that fair work is a huge part of that and that the Unite Hospitality union is part of the industry leadership group. Sustainability and achieving net zero are also important parts of the ILG. We can see the work that is being taken forward to deliver our wellbeing economy ambitions for the sector.

That kind of gives the lie to the comments in the Tory motion that the sector does not work with Government and that there is not very strong collaboration. However, it is hugely important that, to deliver on the strategy, some more immediate challenges need to be addressed. Some of those

have been spoken about already. One is the issue of cost inflation and energy costs, which is a direct consequence of UK Government policy. There are labour shortages, which are largely a consequence of Brexit and the drying up of the labour pool. Skills are, of course, a central issue in the strategy for the sector.

Regulation has been mentioned, and it is a hugely important part of the work with the sector. With the transient visitor levy, there is a real opportunity to work closely with the sector at the outset to design something that works for the sector. I know that the minister, Tom Arthur, understands that and is involved in the process. We can really show how to do regulation well if we get that right and recognise that the value raised from that tax has to be used to support the tourism sector with investment.

I know that there are still wrinkles in the short-term let proposals, but the Government is working hard to iron out those anomalies.

I have a question for the Government. To be frank, I am not quite sure how the new deal business sub-group on regulation interacts with the business regulation task force and Russel Griggs's regulatory review group, so some clarity on how all those groups knit together would be welcome.

As we all know, investment in the infrastructure that supports the sector is hugely important. Keith Brown gave some examples of investment in our rail and road networks across the country. It is too easy to forget things that have been done in the past, but we cannot get away from the fact that more needs to be done. Road connectivity has been mentioned, and it is hugely important that the work on the A9 and the A96 is taken forward as soon as possible.

International route connectivity is important, and I pay tribute to the work of VisitScotland, Scottish Development International and others in the sector. Last night, I had a great meeting with airlines in that regard. More international routes are coming on stream, but more are, of course, required. There also needs to be investment in marketing to support the sector internationally.

Reliability of connectivity, particularly to our islands, is hugely important—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude, Mr McKee.

**Ivan McKee:** —and I know that the Government will work hard to ensure that that is addressed, because the last thing that we need is unreliability leading to tour operators delisting islands, which results in business being turned away.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr McKee. You need to conclude. I call Maggie Chapman.

**Ivan McKee:** I look forward to the new transport minister delivering on all of that.

17:16

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** The Tory motion is a highly principled one. Unfortunately, they are Tory principles. The motion represents an attempt to enforce redistribution by redistributing from the poor to the rich; to ensure sustainability through the sustaining of wealth and privilege; and to embed wellbeing—the being and the doing well of corporations and elites. As usual, the Tories have everything the wrong way round.

As the rest of us have realised, the purpose of an economy is to enable wellbeing—health, fair work, family life, a clean environment and the exchange of beneficial goods and services. Only a few diehards still indulge impossible fantasies of infinite growth on a finite planet.

For the Tories, it seems that tourism is nothing but another extractive industry—a kind of machine through which landscapes, communities and ecosystems are chewed up to produce a dribble or, better, a torrent of profit for those who already own too much.

However, from a human perspective, the purpose of tourism is to enable people to rest and relax; to explore this amazing planet and the extraordinary histories of its inhabitants; to learn about other cultures and their own; to exchange friendships, creative ideas and understandings; and to live better and more gently on our shared earth.

Of course, that requires businesses to provide accommodation, catering and activities to enable experiences and encounters for people living locally and those travelling from afar. Those businesses deserve support when they themselves are a part of the local community in acting to protect and enhance their natural and built environments, encouraging the circulation of tourist income within the local economy, being committed to fair work practices and offering affordable leisure opportunities to those who live and work nearby.

**Bob Doris:** I think that the member is making a point about balance and sustainability in relation to tourism. Would that involve ensuring that all employers in the tourism sector pay the real living wage and treat their employees well? Of course, given that there is labour scarcity—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Maggie Chapman.

**Bob Doris:** —we could allow our asylum seekers to work—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Resume your seat, Mr Doris.

**Maggie Chapman:** I absolutely agree with the sentiment that Bob Doris has expressed in relation to asylum seekers and all employees being paid the living wage.

Good tourism enhances a local area, whether rural or urban, as it brings a renewed appreciation of place, history and tradition; vibrant hospitality; retail and social initiatives; secure jobs and livelihoods; and much-needed income. That is why best practice in many of the world's most sought-after destinations is to permit a visitor levy. Barcelona has had one since 2012, and the levy has attracted quality tourism, sustained the city's budget and funded improvements to the city's infrastructure. Why do the Tories think that Scottish towns, cities and communities do not deserve the same? Do they have so little faith in our country that they do not think that it is worth paying to visit?

Those of us who are proud of Scotland, whether we grew up here or chose to make it our home, know why visitors come here. Yes, it is for the beauty of our landscape, where we have rescued it from the threats of fracking or theme parks; it is for the richness of our biodiversity, which would be all the richer for bolder rewilding; it is for the purity of our rivers and streams, which would be cleaner and safer without the curse of broken glass; and it is for the opportunities to roam our countryside, which would be wider were it not for the grouse playgrounds of the rich. But it is also for our dynamic towns and cities; for what a young Kiwi visitor this week called “the vibe of the place”; for the sense of a Scotland making its own way, learning from the best practices of progressive nations around the world and opening its doors and heart in welcome, especially to those people who are not welcomed elsewhere.

There is a road that is key to Scotland's future tourism. It is neither the A9 nor the A96. It Kenmure street and the community spirit, solidarity and culture of welcome that it represents.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Christine Grahame, who is the final speaker in the open debate, for a strict four minutes.

17:20

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** You do not have to be a Borders MSP to realise the significance of tourism and its related benefits to local retail and the transport sector, but it helps. In my constituency, there are so many tourist

destinations you can trip over them. They range from the large, such as Melrose abbey, Abbotsford, the Great Tapestry of Scotland in Galashiels, and the national mining museum of Scotland in Newtongrange, which has an exhibition in Parliament today, to the small, such as the Trimontium museum—it is all about the Romans—again in Melrose, and the diminutive paper-making museum in Penicuik, where you can actually make paper.

Financial support in the form of Scottish Government grants stretches across the sectors. Almost £7 million was committed to the Great Tapestry of Scotland project from the Scottish Government's regeneration capital grant fund, the Borders railway blueprint programme and the Scottish Borders Council.

Trimontium most recently received £400,000 via South of Scotland Enterprise, which is itself funded by the Scottish Government—I visited Trimontium on Monday to enjoy the new, funded high-spec extension, which is already being used for educational purposes. Newtongrange's mining museum recently received further funding, too, through the £1 million that was allocated to museums, as did Abbotsford, so there is continuing support for landmark attractions.

You have to factor in, too, the support for public transport—the Borders railway, the extended concessionary fare scheme, the support for ScotRail and, of course, the funding that was put in to support the transport and hospitality sectors and other businesses during Covid, when, for example, £129 million was provided to the sector in response to the immediate recommendations of the Scottish tourism recovery task force.

Indeed, I commend local businesses during that period, some of which received Covid funding and some which did not. In Peebles, the Tontine hotel, which is an iconic building at the end of the high street, secured not insubstantial funding through SOSE—again, that is Scottish Government funding.

Stobo Castle health spa near Peebles received Covid support but, with no guests, the proprietor took the opportunity to refurbish and redecorate. That was done in the modest Central bar, too, which is a free house in Peebles that did not qualify for Covid support but where, again, the owner updated the decor both inside and out—it now looks just braw.

One of the real difficulties for hospitality now, which is raised with me time and again, and which contributed at one time to a shortage of bus drivers, is lack of staff since Brexit. When you add in inflation on all fronts—for example, for food, fuel or any building works—it remains tough, no matter the support that the Scottish Government gives.

The UK has one of the highest rates of inflation in the G20, according to today's release from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Part of the solution is in our hands. If you can, even in these austere times, try a holiday or a wee break at home, or simply visit and explore your own town or country—you will surprise yourself, certainly help the local economy and support businesses locally, which deserve it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to closing speeches. I call Jackie Baillie for a strict four minutes.

17:24

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to close the debate for the Scottish Labour Party, not least because the area that I represent is among the most beautiful in Scotland, attracting tourists and visitors who come from near and far.

Tourism matters enormously to the local and national economy. The cabinet secretary mentioned the more than 3 million visitors, spending more than £3 billion. You need only spend a few minutes in Luss, in my constituency, to see the army of visitors from America, China, Europe and the rest of the UK, who are all spending money on accommodation, food and drink, entertainment and souvenirs to take home. That value is now growing again, after the difficult years of the pandemic, with increased numbers of visitors returning to Loch Lomond. Indeed, that is happening across Scotland. It is such a joy to hear all the different accents and languages as you venture down the Royal Mile in Edinburgh.

But is the Government doing enough to capitalise on the opportunity that tourism presents for Scotland? This afternoon has demonstrated areas of concern, though there is much that we can agree on. There is, however, a real problem for the Government with implementation, and the problem is not confined to this area of debate. We have a plethora of legislation and policy that is all very worthy, but its implementation is poor and the unintended consequences are legion.

Let me illustrate that by talking about short-term lets. We must remember that this is the legislation that the Scottish Government has already delayed by six months to allow for dialogue with the sector, so that problems and concerns could be ironed out, which we welcomed. There has been lots of chat and there have been industry working groups, but not one single change has been made, and there are 81 days to go to implementation. In that time, all self-catering, bed and breakfast and other accommodation units need to apply to their local authority for a licence. Local authorities are

struggling and there is no consistency, but, actually, that is not their fault. It appears that the Government has failed to provide any guidance whatsoever. It was promised for 12 May, but it was not delivered.

Let me tell you about the problem in Argyll and Bute. There are some 8,000 to 10,000 self-catering units across the area, including B and Bs, yurts, glamping pods and home shares—the lot. Some 2,354 of those are paying non-domestic rates. So far, 427 have applied but only 53 licences have been granted—out of more than 8,000 units—and we have 81 days to go. There is no chance of those units being licensed in time. Across Scotland, 20 per cent of units have applied and 2 per cent have received licences. Self-catering units and local authorities face an impossible task, all because the SNP Government does not think about implementation.

Of the plethora of suggested changes, such as local authorities being able to issue provisional licences to enable investment in new provision, has anything—even just one thing—been taken forward? The answer is no, not one. That disappointing position was confirmed to the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers in a letter from the Minister for Housing, Paul McLennan, yesterday. There you have it: the SNP Government is deaf to the needs of business and incompetent at the practical implementation, and it charges on regardless. Unfortunately, that is a hallmark of the SNP's approach to government, but it has profound consequences for the tourism sector in Scotland.

I agree with much of what Daniel Johnson, Willie Rennie and Carol Mochan had to say. We need to make much more of the opportunity and potential of tourism and we need to invest in brand Scotland, but where are the new flights and ferries to get visitors to our beautiful islands, what about roads such as the A82, A83, A9 and A96 and, as Willie Rennie said, where are the toilets?

We have—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please conclude.

**Jackie Baillie:** —amazing natural assets, but this SNP Government needs to do more to positively harness and support the opportunity for the sector to grow.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Tom Arthur to close for the Government. Minister, you have a tight five minutes.

17:28

**The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur):** I thank members

for their contributions and Liz Smith for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

Regardless of the particular views that we might have in a political context, we all recognise that Scotland has so much to be proud of in our tourism sector. I put on record my thanks to all those who work across our tourism sector for the jobs that they create, the economic contribution that they make and the opportunities that they create for so many people.

From the significant post-pandemic recovery, we have seen just how resilient the sector is, and we have a shared ambition to see a flourishing tourism sector for all of Scotland. We particularly recognise the contribution that tourism makes to our wider economies, whether that is helping to populate our city and town centres, supporting the wider retail, hospitality and leisure offering or providing jobs and economic activity in some of our most remote and fragile communities. We all have a shared interest in seeing a flourishing tourism sector in Scotland.

In the Government, we are committed to doing all that we can to support our tourism sector. I want to turn to the points that have been raised and the substantive point around regulation, which is something that the Scottish Government has recognised and which the First Minister and the cabinet secretary have been clear on. I assure Mr McKee that we continue to take forward the work of the joint task force on regulation, which is forming part of the new deal. It is integrated into that process and is a key priority. Implementation is key.

**Willie Rennie:** Will the minister give way?

**Tom Arthur:** Certainly, very briefly.

**Willie Rennie:** That is all fine, but what does he think about public toilets? [*Laughter.*]

**Tom Arthur:** He sets me up nicely. They are incredibly important. I recognise that there were some chuckles, but Willie Rennie makes a very serious point. Recognising that they are a local government responsibility, we are committed to providing a discretionary power for local government to implement, should they wish, in order to generate additional revenue to invest in their local visitor economies.

That is exactly what the visitor levy bill will deliver, if it is passed by Parliament. I welcome the support that it has received from the Labour Party and the close collaboration that we have had with industry and COSLA. I also recognise the positive comments that have been made by the Scottish Tourism Alliance, recognising the approach that we are taking in asking VisitScotland to establish an expert group to ensure that we have the best guidance and implementation. I also highlight that



the STA has also said that we should look at the visitor levy as something that can be a “force for good”.

Visitor levies are commonplace across Europe and provide an opportunity to generate additional revenue. The way in which that revenue will be deployed will, ultimately, be for local authorities to determine, but it will be the result of consultation and collaboration with businesses and communities. I would ask all members to engage constructively, including those who may have an in-principle opposition to a visitor levy. My door is open to constructive engagement, because it is vital that we get this right.

**Murdo Fraser:** As the minister for public finance, Tom Arthur rightly challenges us and other parties when we call for reductions in taxation. I note that the amendment from his colleague talks about cuts to VAT. Can I therefore ask him by how much he would cut VAT, how the cut would be funded and what the total cost would be?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you some of that time back, minister.

**Tom Arthur:** Of course, one of the benefits that the UK Government has, which the Scottish Government does not have, is that it can go to the Debt Management Office and sell gilts. *[Interruption.]* Yes, but if you operate that within a macroeconomic framework—*[Interruption.]* I recognise that fiscal sustainability might be an alien concept to the Conservatives following the mini-budget, but there is an opportunity there. The member raises—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, could you resume your seat a second.

I know that time is tight and that interventions have not been possible in every instance, but the minister has taken a couple of interventions. So, could we stop heckling from a sedentary position?

**Tom Arthur:** It is important to recognise that it is specifically a call from industry. However, the UK Government has flexibility around borrowing that the devolved Administrations do not have. It is about having that opportunity to use that tax cut to stimulate investment. That is not an option that we have within the confines of the fiscal framework. Any reasonable member assessing that would realise that.

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the minister give way?

**Tom Arthur:** I am afraid that I need to make progress. I have only a few minutes left.

Maggie Chapman touched on a lot of points in her contribution, including the importance of tourism to communities. We have to ensure that our small businesses, which make up so much of

our tourism sector, continue to benefit, and that jobs and the revenue that is generated from so much of our tourism economy are used to support the resilience of our local and regional economies.

I am going to have to draw my remarks to a conclusion, but I want to touch on the points that Keith Brown made. Ultimately, he recognised that so many of the key levers that dictate and shape the macroeconomic environment in which we operate rest with the UK Government. Many of the challenges that we face, particularly around labour shortages, can fundamentally be addressed only by the UK Government. I want to work in partnership and engage to ensure that we continue to see a thriving tourism sector for all of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Murdo Fraser to wind up the debate—you have a tight six minutes.

17:33

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** This has been a wide-ranging and quite constructive debate. We have had Willie Rennie bursting for the toilet, Rachael Hamilton trying to sell us a campervan and Maggie Chapman, as usual, wired to the moon and on a different planet from the rest of us. *[Interruption.]*

Throughout the debate, we have heard that the tourism industry is one of the keystones of the Scottish economy. It generates billions of pounds of revenue and employs hundreds of thousands of people. Scotland has a great tourism product that attracts visitors from all over the world—and yet, as we have heard, the mood in the sector at present is dark. A wide range of challenges faces an industry that is—as Liz Smith reminded us—overwhelmingly made up of small and medium-sized businesses. Just as the sector seeks to recover from Covid, it has been hit with a list of problems, many of which come back to the door of the Scottish Government.

Against that backdrop, it is astonishing that Humza Yousaf, when he became First Minister, decided that in his Government there would no longer be a minister with the title of minister for tourism: there is space for a dedicated Minister for Independence, but tourism does not get a mention. What a signal that sends to the sector about its importance to this Government.

I will address some of the challenges that have been raised during the debate. A number of members quite rightly raised workforce issues and the problems that the sector has in attracting staff. It is true that many businesses struggle to get staff—they have to operate on shortened hours or even to turn away trade because they cannot find people to fill vacancies. SNP members seem to

blame that entirely on Brexit, but the facts are much more complex than that, because every other western economy is currently facing workforce issues.

When I visited Germany last summer with a range of colleagues from across the parties in Parliament, the number 1 concern from German businesses, apart from the cost of energy, was the lack of available labour. It is the same in France and Italy and elsewhere. It cannot be Brexit that is causing those issues in other European countries, so it must be something else.

We see that, according to the latest figures, net immigration—

**Neil Gray:** We could improve on one area if, alongside the work that we are doing on a talent attraction and migration services, the UK Government would accept our proposal for a rural visa pilot. Will Murdo Fraser back that call today?

**Murdo Fraser:** The problem with the approach that the cabinet secretary takes is that net immigration to the UK is currently double what it was prior to Brexit. It is at record levels.

The question for the cabinet secretary is this: why are the migrants who are coming to the UK not coming to Scotland? What is it about Scotland, under this SNP Government, that is not attracting them?

**Ivan McKee:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Murdo Fraser:** I am sorry. I do not have time.

We need to look for other ways of attracting people into the tourism sector. My colleague Maurice Golden last week hosted, in Parliament, an excellent event highlighting the work of the charity Only A Pavement Away, which is about attracting into the hospitality sector prison leavers, people who are homeless and people who come from otherwise difficult backgrounds. It was an inspiring event, at which there were some real success stories.

I have seen for myself the success of apprenticeship schemes that are run by businesses such as Crieff Hydro, which offer younger people secure and rewarding careers in the tourism sector. There is much more to be done in the area, but it is right to highlight a key concern about the need to encourage more young people into rewarding long-term careers.

We have heard about the business rates that are paid by the sector. South of the border, businesses have been given a 75 per cent relief for the current year, but despite having the Barnett consequential from that, the Scottish Government has made different choices. However, the rates burden is one of the major issues that are raised

by the sector, and it is entirely within the gift of the Scottish Government to do something about it.

On the matter of tax, I was—to be frank—astonished that the Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance seemed to be arguing that the UK Government should increase borrowing to fund tax cuts. That is exactly what the SNP Government criticised Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng for when they were in Government, but now ministers are advocating it as a policy that the Government should follow.

A number of members talked about the licensing scheme for short-term lets. I was encouraged because there seems to be a broad reflection across the chamber, among members from all parties, that that was causing real issues. Jackie Baillie gave us the figures for Argyll and Bute, which are really worrying. I urge the Government to look again at the scheme and to consider whether something might be done with a new intervention in that area. Otherwise, we will see businesses becoming unable to operate because local authorities cannot process applications fast enough to allow them to continue.

We see the same impact resulting from connectivity issues. Just last week, I was talking in Parliament to a hotelier who was telling me about the difficulties that hotels in the islands have in attracting bookings because of the growing uncertainty about ferry services. As Willie Rennie and others said, we saw a huge public protest in Lochboisdale, in South Uist, last week, which highlights the fact that, for the month of June, the community will experience massive disruption to the ferry service. That is doing real damage to the tourism industry in the Highlands and Islands right now, and it has happened on the watch of the Scottish Government.

We are still waiting for a programme for completing the dualling of the A9 and the A96—again, those are long-awaited and long-delayed promises from the SNP Government. Just two weeks ago, there was yet another fatality on the A9, on the Tomatin to Moy section. Work was supposed to have started on that section by now, but again somebody has lost his life. That needs to change.

All the issues that I have talked about are within the gift of the Scottish Government to resolve. People across the sector are crying out for Scottish Government support but, instead, its major initiative is what? It is a new tourist tax, which will take yet more money out of a sector that is already hard pressed. As Edward Mountain said, if the Scottish Government does not change its approach, it is in danger of killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. We all want a thriving tourism sector, but we will have that only if the Government recognises that the industry—which

is made up mostly of smaller operators—needs to be encouraged and supported. Instead of focusing on independence, supporting tourism should be the Scottish Government’s priority.

I have pleasure in supporting the motion in the name of my colleague Liz Smith.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I ask for your guidance on comments that were made by Murdo Fraser a few moments ago. I am probably one of the oldest MSPs in the chamber. In my 40-year working career, which has included 31 years as a police officer, I can honestly say that I have never heard such a display of inappropriate behaviour and entitlement. Therefore, I ask for your guidance on any appropriate action.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** As I have just assumed the chair, I am not wholly clear with regard to Audrey Nicoll’s comments. Members’ contributions are not generally a matter for the chair; they are a matter for members themselves. Of course, when an inaccurate statement has been made, a correction mechanism exists.

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Can you advise the chamber on the opportunities that a member might have to apologise for using harmful ableist tropes that are used to ridicule people with mental health issues?

In his summing up, Murdo Fraser used the trope “wired to the moon” to describe our Green colleague Maggie Chapman. I found that to be wholly inappropriate, and it should have been dealt with when he said it.

**The Presiding Officer:** I will look into the matter, and I will be back in touch with the member in due course.

## Business Motions

17:42

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

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-09361, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I invite George Adam to move the motion.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 13 June 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan - Annual Progress Report 2022-23

*followed by* Education, Children and Young People Committee Debate: College Regionalisation

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members’ Business

Wednesday 14 June 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy; Finance and Parliamentary Business

*followed by* Scottish Labour Party Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members’ Business

Thursday 15 June 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister’s Questions

*followed by* Members’ Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

2.15 pm Portfolio Questions: Net Zero and Just Transition

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Provisional  
Outturn

*followed by* Debate on the Scottish Parliament's  
Gender Sensitive Audit

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 20 June 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 21 June 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Bail and Release  
from Custody (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

7.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 22 June 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Social Justice

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Children (Care and  
Justice) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Stage 3 Debate: Bail and Release from  
Custody (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.25 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 12 June 2023, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-09362, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 1 timetable. I invite George Adam to move the motion.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 31 January 2024.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:43

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-09363, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument. I ask George Adam to move the motion on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the International Organisations (Immunities and Privileges) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2023 [draft] be approved.—[George Adam]

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

## Decision Time

17:43

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

The first question is, that amendment S6M-09339.3, in the name of Neil Gray, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09339, in the name of Liam Kerr, on a thriving future for Scotland's oil and gas sector and its workers, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

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

17:44

*Meeting suspended.*

17:46

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Neil Gray is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sarah Boyack will fall.

The question is, that amendment S6M-09339.3, in the name of Neil Gray, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09339, in the name of Liam Kerr, on a thriving future for Scotland's oil and gas sector and its workers, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and  
 Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 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)

#### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 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)  
 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)  
 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)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 61, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-09339, in the name of Liam Kerr, as amended, on a thriving future for Scotland's oil and gas sector and its workers, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is closed.

**The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My voting app did not work. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Dey. 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)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)

Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and  
 Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 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)

#### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 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)  
 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)  
 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)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 61, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

#### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises the role that is played by oil and gas in the energy profile of Scotland, the tens of thousands of jobs in that sector, and the essential contribution that the sector's skilled workforce must make to Scotland's present and future energy security; recognises that the draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan sets out a future energy pathway for Scotland and highlights that, to realise its climate change ambitions, Scotland needs to transform the way it generates, transports and uses energy; notes that the Scottish Government has consulted on whether, in order to support the fastest possible and most effective just transition, there should be a presumption against new exploration for oil and gas, with a final decision to be made later in 2023; acknowledges that huge progress has been made in the energy transition in the last 20 years; reiterates its firm commitment to ensuring a just transition and that just transition principles are embedded in legislation; calls, therefore, on the UK Government to support the fastest possible just transition for the oil and gas sector; expresses deep disappointment that the UK Government has repeatedly refused to match the Scottish Government's £500 million Just Transition Fund for the north east and Moray, despite benefitting to the tune of hundreds of billions of pounds at today's prices over decades from North Sea oil and gas, and calls on the UK Government to support the deployment of carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) for the Scottish Cluster to capitalise on Scotland's competitive advantage, including its world-leading workforce, who will drive forward the just transition and help industry to decarbonise at pace.

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

The next question is, that amendment S6M-09340.2, in the name of Neil Gray, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09340, in the name of Liz Smith, on prioritising Scottish tourism, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members: No.**

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

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 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)

**Against**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 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)  
 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)  
 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)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 60, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that motion S6M-09340, in the name of Liz Smith, as amended, on prioritising Scottish tourism, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members: No.**

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

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)



Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 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)

#### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 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)

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)  
 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)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 61, Against 47, Abstentions 0.

#### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament welcomes the role that Scotland's world-class tourism offering plays in creating jobs, sustaining communities and enhancing appreciation of the outstanding natural environment and cultural assets right across the country; notes that there were an estimated 3.2 million overseas visits to Scotland in 2022, which is only 7% lower than in 2019, whereas the comparable figure for the rest of the UK remained 25% below 2019; further notes that the proposed legislation for a visitor levy will provide local authorities with the powers to raise additional revenue if they choose and that revenue will be invested in improving services, with benefit for both visitors and the wider community in their area, further strengthening Scotland's tourism offer; considers that energy costs, the need to cut VAT, the impact of high inflation and the impact of Brexit on labour shortages are the key issues facing the Scottish tourism sector; calls on the UK Government to use its reserved powers in a manner that supports rather than hampers Scottish tourism, and notes that all the signs are that 2023 will be a successful year for Scotland's tourism sector.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-09363, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the International Organisations (Immunities and Privileges) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2023 [draft] be approved.

**Local Bus Services**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The final item of business this evening is a members' business debate on motion S6M-09106, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on transforming local bus services. The debate will be concluded without any questions being put. As ever, I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament considers that buses have a critical role in tackling the climate emergency, building a fairer transport system, and improving access to opportunities; believes that the roll-out of the Young Persons' (Under 22s) Free Bus Travel scheme has inspired a new generation of bus users, with, it understands, over 62 million journeys made so far; commends the work of community groups, such as the Glenfarg Community Transport Group, for transforming bus networks where they live and providing local communities with lifeline services; recognises what it sees as the central role of communities and local authorities in strengthening public transport connections and breaking the cycle of decline in bus services, including by using powers available through the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019; understands that section 34 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 provides local transport authorities the ability to set up their own publicly-owned bus services, and welcomes the Scottish Government's Community Bus Fund, which aims to provide start-up funding to empower local transport authorities to transform local bus services where they live.

17:56

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I thank members from across the chamber who signed my motion to secure the debate, and I look forward to everyone's contributions and the minister's response.

Last week, I hosted a reception for Scottish bus week. Here, in Parliament, we had bus drivers, passenger groups, bus champions and transport organisations, who are all passionate about improving Scotland's bus networks, and the room was alive with ideas. I want to especially thank Kevin Stewart for engaging and listening so well and reflecting that passion during his speech at the event, and I am sure that the whole chamber wishes Mr Stewart well.

In my region of Mid Scotland and Fife, I have seen the same thing: communities full of ideas of how to improve services where they live. We should take note of what those organisations and communities say, because we spend a lot of time in the chamber talking about what is wrong with bus services in Scotland, but we spend less time setting out how we want to transform our bus network. At the heart of our vision for better buses should be a few central principles.

First, buses must be reliable. One of the most common inquiries that I have from constituents

about bus services is about short-notice cancellations of services. Whether it is McGill's in Stirling and Clacks or Stagecoach in Perth and Fife, folks are finding it harder and harder to rely on buses to commute to work, head to school or meet up with family and friends. Cancelled services erode passenger confidence in bus services, particularly in rural areas where people can be left without any other option to make their journey.

Passengers and regulators such as the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland should be able to hold bus operators to account, but too often they are hampered by a lack of available evidence. Therefore, we need a Scottish equivalent of England's bus open data system, which shares live data on bus fares and service information. We have the equivalent powers available in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, and it is time to make them a reality.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** The member is right about buses being cancelled, often at short notice, which happens in cities, too. When we have raised that with First Bus and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, they have said that the issue is often a shortage of drivers. Does the member agree that that is one of the issues?

**Mark Ruskell:** Yes, absolutely. The bus industry has faced a number of headwinds, some of which are being caused by Brexit, and the driver shortage is very much part of that picture. However, fundamentally, where there is not a good reason for services being cancelled and passengers experiencing poor services, we need to hold the companies to account. The bus open data system is a really good way to do that, and I think that that would be welcomed by the traffic commissioner.

Secondly, our buses must be affordable. From subsidies to concessionary travel schemes, millions of pounds of Scottish Government money is given to bus operators. Despite that, private bus operators have recently hiked fares. There has been a 9 per cent increase in Glasgow, a 12 per cent increase in the Highlands and a 15 per cent increase in Perth and Fife.

Earlier this year, the former transport minister, Jenny Gilruth, committed to a review of all public subsidies for bus, to look at how increased conditionality on public funding could improve bus services. Applying conditions to public grants is not new. We need to see conditionality applied to all Scottish Government funding for private bus operators to prevent profiteering, fare hikes and cancellations.

We need to see an integrated ticketing system that allows people to take the bus, train, tram or

metro using one ticket or travel card. I hope to see that in the Scottish Government's upcoming fair fares review.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mark Ruskell:** If I have time, Presiding Officer, I would be delighted to.

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

**Paul Sweeney:** I thank the member for giving way. He is making a very good speech. He made the point about public subsidy of bus companies. Does he agree that simply providing that without having visibility of the profits that are being generated by privatised bus operators is not good enough and that we should consider using grants not in a blind way, but as a way to take public equity stakes in privatised bus companies?

**Mark Ruskell:** I think that that is a useful contribution from Mr Sweeney. Later in my speech, I will come on to talk about how we need to reform the system so that we have much more public control over and transparency in the way that our public transport is being run in Scotland.

My third point is that our buses must be accessible. That means ensuring two things: that communities have a bus service that they can access and that services meet the needs of all passengers. Rural communities are particularly vulnerable to the boom-and-bust cycle of profit-driven private bus services. From the withdrawal of the X53 service in 2021 to the recent axing of the 155 service connecting Tibbermore residents to Crieff and Perth, cash-strapped local authorities are expected to patch up what is effectively a broken commercial system.

Too often, rural communities are left with no public transport provision of any sort. However, communities such as the Glenfarg Community Transport Group are showing us what can be done. In April, the community group launched bus service 55, which runs on another recently axed route from Glenfarg to Kinross. I am pleased to say that it carried around 200 passengers in its first week. Such community-driven projects show exactly what buses can do when private profit is taken out of the picture. We need to see community transport groups such as that in Glenfarg integrated into Scotland's bus network.

We also have one of the most expansive concessionary travel schemes in the world, with all under-22s, people over 60 and disabled people benefiting from free bus travel across Scotland, but we must aspire to go further to address the acute transport poverty that is faced by some communities. That means investing in a bus fleet that empowers anyone with a wheelchair, mobility

requirements, a baby buggy or a bike to choose the bus, and extending free bus travel to people seeking asylum in Scotland, who are forced to live on only £45 a week—I commend Paul Sweeney's leadership in that area.

Finally, we need system change, as I said earlier. Our buses must surely now be run in the public interest. Years of deregulation of bus services has left a fragile patchwork of services and operators in which the needs of passengers are secondary. From that broken system, we need to build an ecology of bus travel that shifts the balance of power away from for-profit models towards the public interest.

We already have some of the tools that we need to build this new system. Through the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, local authorities can franchise and set up municipally owned services. Those models will not work for all local authorities, but some of them are desperate to get things moving. Glasgow City Council has already taken its first steps in exploring public control for buses, and Highland Council has invested in a fleet of buses to serve community needs. I hope that the community bus fund will provide a source of start-up capital to accelerate the radical shift in bus ownership that we desperately need to see.

Full transformation of Scotland's bus services will require significant investment, but Tory austerity has a stranglehold on Scottish budgets. Therefore, it is more important than ever that we consider all possible ways to raise revenue and finance this reform. That means diverting funds from high-carbon road building projects to public transport, putting the workplace parking levy back on to our agenda and using the powers available to introduce local road user charges. We need all members and people across our local and national Governments, in our communities, organisations and passengers to back our buses and deliver the transformation in local bus networks that people in Scotland want and deserve.

I look forward to working with colleagues from all parties, the Minister for Transport and communities on the ground to deliver on that ambition. I also look forward to the contribution of other members and the minister in this debate.

18:05

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I am happy to speak on public and sustainable transport in general and on buses in particular. I therefore thank Mark Ruskell for the opportunity to do so.

To start on a positive note, there is a lot of good news. Free bus travel for under-22s and over-60s, which I have to say includes me, allows people to get out and about and go to work, study, visit

family and friends and, as a result, improve their physical and mental health.

In Glasgow, we are seeing greatly increased numbers of electric vehicles, which help to improve air quality and tackle climate change, while also giving passengers a smoother, quieter ride. First Bus in Glasgow tells us that it will soon have more than 200 emission-free vehicles.

In Edinburgh, there is an exceptionally good bus service. Just last week, I was staying in Craightinny, a part of the city that I did not know at all. However, between Google Maps, Lothian Buses' own app and excellent signage at the bus stops, I could travel between there and Parliament with no problem.

However, I accept that it is not all good news. Bus passenger numbers in Glasgow and the west of Scotland have been falling since well before Covid and there is a variety of reasons for that. Many parts of Glasgow have a good local train service, which is usually faster, more predictable and gives a more comfortable journey than the bus. For example, the 64 bus takes about 38 minutes to get from Carmyle, in my constituency, to the city centre. In contrast, the train takes 14 minutes, so the bus really cannot compete with the train on that full journey, and I get a lot of complaints that the bus service is not good enough.

It has been suggested that public ownership would make all the difference to bus services, and there would be some obvious gains, such as any profits being reinvested in public services and perhaps a more joined-up approach to ticketing. However, ScotRail has moved into public ownership already and, as far as I can see, the services are pretty much as before. Lothian Buses previously told us at committee that it would make very little difference to its services whether it was publicly or privately owned. My own memory of public ownership by the likes of the Glasgow Corporation is that there were still many complaints about the service and the feeling was that solid Labour-voting areas—we might find it hard to believe that such areas used to exist—such as Castlemilk got a better bus service than other areas that voted in different way. If we want to increase bus or train services, pay the staff more or reduce fares, that comes at a cost, whoever the owner is. We can lower fares and raise taxes to pay for that if we want to—that is a perfectly feasible choice—but we should realise that the money available will not suddenly increase just because of public ownership.

So far, I hope that I have tried to make reasonable and logical points, as an accountant and member of the Finance Committee should be doing. However, another factor is at play here: the emotional side. Many people have an emotional

love affair with their car. It gives them the sense that they have achieved something in life, that they are in control of their lives and they no longer have to walk to a bus stop or wait in the rain for a bus at the mercy of others. This is not just a debate about money and frequency of buses, although it certainly is that; it also has to be a debate about how we get people to fall out of love with their cars, and I am not quite sure how we do that.

I commend Mark Ruskell for his motion and the debate. We face some challenges in relation to sustainable transport, but I remain enthusiastic about public transport, including buses, and I certainly hope that all members of the Scottish Parliament will set an example by using them as much as they can. Thank you.

18:09

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** I congratulate Mark Ruskell on securing this debate, which is the second debate on buses that we have had in a short spell. Of course, there have been a number of events focusing on the issue of buses recently, including the reception that Mr Ruskell organised. Further, the cross-party group on sustainable transport, which I convene, has also been looking at public transport and how we can decarbonise buses, trains and ferries. There is a lot of interest in those issues in the Parliament and, indeed, a lot of agreement on the challenges and what should be done.

I was very taken by the recent Friends of the Earth paper called “On the Move—Investing in public transport”, which estimates that Scotland needs to shift around 3.7 billion car passenger miles a year to public transport, walking and cycling by 2030 to meet its carbon targets. It says that that will require an average increase in bus and tram passenger miles by around 80 per cent and a more than doubling of rail passenger miles in Scotland compared to pre-Covid levels. Of course, that will take a huge amount of public investment, which John Mason touched on in his excellent speech.

Mr Mason presented us with a challenge: how do we fall out of love with our cars? For me, it is not about falling out of love with our cars; it is about how we improve public transport so that people do not feel the need to drive. That is the challenge. Many people, including myself, like to use public transport, but it has to be there.

**John Mason:** I thank the member for picking up on my point, but does he not agree that there are some people in our society who, if they could, would take their car into the pub, into the school and absolutely everywhere else, because they are so attached to it?

**Graham Simpson:** I have no doubt that that is true, but I think that there are also many people who would rather not use their car if they had a viable alternative. Mr Mason will be well aware that there are far too many bus deserts in this country—areas that just do not have a decent service. I live in one of those areas: East Kilbride. I got the bus down to Hamilton during Scottish bus week and I had to walk for half an hour to get to the bus stop that would get me there. That is a ludicrous situation.

We have lost a number of services over the years. I have lost a service—I used to have a decent service and now I do not. I was made aware of a service that runs between Crieff and Perth—the number 155—that is facing the axe on 1 July, and no reasonable alternative has been put forward. Local campaigns are being fought throughout the country, and we really need to do something about the situation.

Part of the answer might be to use the powers in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 that empower councils to take on bus services. However, we have to accept that there could be a colossal cost to that—it has been estimated that, in Glasgow, that could cost £200 million—and that it could take years to do. I am fully in favour of councils taking up those powers, but we need to accept the challenges around that.

We all want bus services to improve. Fares are part of the solution, I think. In England and elsewhere—places such as Germany, which have good systems in place—fares have been cut. We need to make buses more affordable, and the buses need to be there. That is the way that we will get people to use them.

18:14

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members’ interests.

I thank Mark Ruskell for bringing this debate to the chamber and for highlighting in his motion the role of buses in tackling the climate emergency. We need to deliver a modal shift from cars and planes to public transport such as buses. However, as I am sure Mark Ruskell agrees, our current efforts to do that are inadequate. Graham Simpson has spoken about the limited bus services that are available in many parts of Scotland, and he mentioned the local campaigns throughout the country for better bus services. We need to encourage people to use buses, and the Scottish Government needs to do more to promote the use of the existing bus network.

I fully agree with the spirit of the motion and with Mark Ruskell’s speech. We need an affordable, reliable public bus service that tackles inequalities,

supports the economy and helps to deliver Scotland's climate aims.

The motion focuses on the community transport pilots that have been introduced and on bus passes for young people, which, of course, I warmly welcome, as I welcome all the other initiatives that have been introduced to encourage bus use. However, we need to be more ambitious and we must encourage the use of buses and significantly expand our bus network if we are to make buses the choice that people make.

Our current model is broken. Since the 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government deregulated buses, we have been left with an expensive, unreliable, fragmented and dysfunctional bus system that is slowly following apart. The Scottish Government seems to accept that the privatisation of rail did not work—although I note what John Mason said—so it is not clear why it thinks that a privatised model works better for buses. It may well be that the minister agrees with me on that point. I believe that this debate is not just about public interest; it is also about public sector ownership and control.

Between 1995 and 2020, fares rose by 58 per cent in real terms, and, since 2007, we have seen a 52 per cent reduction in bus journeys. Those are long-term trends that we are dealing with. As we all know, private operators throughout Scotland are cutting lifeline bus services—every MSP will know of examples of that in their local area. In North Ayrshire, services have been cut from the Garnock valley to Glasgow and from Irvine and the three towns, with the use of transport hubs at Prestwick, Irvine and Kilmarnock, which is significantly increasing transport times.

We need the Scottish Government to come forward with a plan to significantly expand the bus network. I believe that that includes capping fares to encourage people to use buses, and it also involves bringing buses under local control by enabling the expansion of the municipal provision of bus services—I say to John Mason that I do not believe that it is a coincidence that Lothian Buses is considered to provide the best-value service in Scotland.

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 gives the power to local authorities and transport authorities to set up municipal bus companies, but we now need the regulation to enable such municipal bus companies to become a reality.

It is true to say that we need more resources—we need to find a range of ways to increase funding—but I think that the point that has been made about conditionality highlights the fact that the significant investment that the Scottish Government has made in the privatised bus

network has not always represented the best use of public funds.

I very much look forward to the further contributions to this debate.

18:18

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I thank Mark Ruskell for bringing forward this debate—one in the spirit of members' debates in which, in the main, we shine a light on the activities in our constituencies.

Borders Buses is the main provider of bus transport across the Borders and parts of Midlothian, and I commend it for surviving the Covid pandemic—a period during which it transported health workers for free. Now, the company is extending routes and consulting on others. It also has an app with a tracker, so there is no need to ask the usual questions, "Is the bus due?" and "Have I missed the bus?" It also lets people know whether there is wheelchair access to the bus. I have to say that, since Borders Buses took over from First Scotland East, much has improved, including the fleet. Therefore, I do not think that privatisation is always a bad thing. I think that the company makes a pretty good job of running that service. I would say that I am its critical friend.

**Paul Sweeney:** Does Christine Grahame recognise that around 45 per cent of all private bus operators' turnover is public money, delivered through subsidies, and that many of those buses have been bought through that subsidy from the public purse?

**Christine Grahame:** I certainly do not rule out municipal ownership, but I am watching a family-owned company that has pulled up the service in my constituency by its bootstraps. I criticise when that is necessary, but there has been huge improvement across the Scottish Borders and into Midlothian.

The extended concessionary fares do, of course, support those services, but the over-60s have not returned to using buses in pre-Covid numbers. I understand why that has happened, but it is having an impact on services.

In rural constituencies such as mine, regular bus providers cannot reach every hamlet and village, and a car can be a necessity. That brings me to the issue of community transport in the Borders and Midlothian. Gala wheels, which I have visited, provides affordable and accessible transport for disadvantaged, rurally excluded, sensory impaired and elderly residents in the central Borders. The service, which uses volunteer drivers—subject to their availability—makes a big difference to users,

who are often lone pensioners with no family or friends to help them remain socially included. The service has three vehicles, an accessible 11-seater minibus and two smaller five to six-seat vehicles specially adapted for wheelchair use. It takes groups and individuals from throughout the central Borders on outings, for shopping, to lunch clubs and so on. Its sister service, Tweed wheels, provides a similar service using a minibus that has been adapted to take up to three passengers with wheelchairs and a smaller vehicle that can carry two people in wheelchairs plus four passengers.

In Midlothian, Lothian Community Transport Services, which is an independent organisation, provides, promotes and supports high-quality passenger transport services to not-for-profit organisations in Edinburgh, Midlothian and West Lothian. A community bus covers the villages of Temple and Carrington, the larger Gorebridge, Birkenside, Newtongrange—home of the National Mining Museum of Scotland—and Gowkhill, which the other bus services may not reach.

LCTS also runs a dial-a-bus service for people with mobility issues. Users must book, but it is available to them if they want to go shopping or visit the general practitioner surgery. On Mondays—I am giving you the bus timetable now—the service picks people up in Penicuik and Auchendinny at 9.30, drops them off in the town centre and collects them at 11.30. On Wednesday, the service goes from Penicuik and Auchendinny to the large shopping centre at Straiton.

Broomhill day centre in Penicuik provides transport to pick up elderly folk who spend the day there. It, too, depends on volunteer drivers. I visited the service recently and saw the driver checking the addresses where he would pick folk up.

Those are just a few examples, and I welcome the extension of those services through the £1 million that the Scottish Government has allocated to the community bus fund. That is particularly important in the rural area that I represent.

18:23

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I congratulate Mark Ruskell on securing the debate.

It would be remiss of me, as a Lothian MSP and former councillor of the City of Edinburgh Council, if I did not mention during a transport debate the long-awaited opening of the Newhaven section of the Edinburgh tram network, which happened today. That is very welcome, good news for many parts of the city. Although I welcome the route's completion, I restate my disappointment with the time that is being taken to publish the report of the inquiry into the tram project. The report was completed a few weeks ago, but we are still

waiting to see what it says. The people of Edinburgh, and of Scotland, have been deeply inconvenienced for a number of years and we all deserve answers.

I am delighted to speak in this debate about local bus services. As someone who does not drive or cycle, I am a huge fan of buses and rely on the bus network to get me around Edinburgh and the Lothians. Without that, I would be dependent on the generosity of friends and family for lifts and would be completely incapable of helping my two daughters reach their various commitments around the city. I am free to roam the Lothians as and when I choose, enjoying the various excitements that our capital and the area beyond have to offer.

A well-run bus network is essential for disabled people. The ability to get around should be a priority rather than an afterthought. In places that are not well served by buses, the quality of life of disabled people is damaged. In my region of Lothian, we see both ends of the spectrum. Here, in the city of Edinburgh, we have a world-class service, yet just across the region in Midlothian, we have a much poorer service. To be fair, there are reasonably good transport links from Midlothian into Edinburgh, but getting from town to town in Midlothian is a completely different matter. The radial nature of a bus network that is centred on Edinburgh means that, often, there is no direct route between two locations that are close together geographically.

**Mark Ruskell:** I thank the member for explaining some of the challenges with integrating services when we have a very fragmented set of companies running those services.

Does the member acknowledge that, with the benefit of hindsight, the deregulation of bus services in the 1980s was perhaps a wrong-headed move?

**Jeremy Balfour:** Well, in Lothian and Midlothian, the services are all run by Lothian Buses, so in my part of Midlothian we do not have a particularly fragmented service.

On my previous point, I will give an example. To get from Pathhead to Straiton, it is necessary to take one bus all the way to the edge of Holyrood park and then another one all the way back out, with the result that a journey that should probably take 15 minutes by bus can take more than an hour.

**John Mason:** Would the member agree that, although there is a challenge with circular bus routes, often there is simply not the demand to make more direct routes pay, and that quite a heavy subsidy would be needed? In Glasgow, we have had the same problem.

**Jeremy Balfour:** I accept John Mason's point, but there is a public service duty. There is a particular issue for people who do not drive who need to get between different parts of our regions. That is an issue that we need to consider.

Obviously, there are a number of factors that make it difficult to create effective transport links for every possible journey within Midlothian, but if we want our smaller communities to be as accessible as possible, and if we want people to drive less, we must provide the necessary infrastructure.

I want to briefly touch on one other issue, which has been brought to my attention by disability access panels from across Scotland. In my capacity as convener of the cross-party group on disability, I have been meeting access panels to find out what issues affect disabled people around Scotland. There have been a number of common issues, but one issue that comes up more than any other is that of access to public transport points. From the state of our pavements and roads to the rise of floating bus stops, we are not considering the needs of people with limited mobility. Public transport is useful only if people can access it.

Apparently, there are plans in the city of Edinburgh to review the number of bus stops, with a view to reducing them. I strongly advise against doing that. The extra distance between stops might seem small to an able-bodied person but, for many disabled people, it represents the difference between having the ability to get on a bus and being forced not to use a bus. I could go on, but I will not.

Buses are an excellent tool for disabled people, but only if they are able to access them.

18:29

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** I had not planned to speak in the debate, but I would like to offer some brief reflections on some of the issues that Mark Ruskell raised in his speech, and off the back of what Jeremy Balfour has just said about accessibility.

Buses themselves absolutely have to be accessible to wheelchair users and those with limited mobility, as well as to people with buggies and prams. Crucially, those two sets of users must not be put in competition with each other, as is often the case at the moment. Buses must also be accessible to people with a wider range of impairments.

I am the convener of the cross-party group on stroke, where we have heard regularly about people with aphasia often being challenged when sitting in accessible seats on buses. Much of this

is about changing public attitudes to hidden disabilities, but practical things could also be done to provide support.

People with aphasia and other verbal communication issues often have an issue with communicating to a bus driver where they want to go and then trying to get the correct fare, and often it is even more difficult when there is a queue of people behind who are impatient to get on. Audio and visual stop announcements make it easier for everyone to know where they are going, and I am always struck by the difference between operators in my Central Scotland region and those here in Lothian. For refugees and others coming to Scotland, such adaptations are useful in allowing them to access their areas.

Being able to get to the bus is, as Jeremy Balfour has just said, a real issue, too. Since the closure of the bus station in Falkirk, many buses terminate in the town centre. Although the street that the buses are on is accessible, relatively flat and well maintained, the surrounding streets are quite steep. As Graham Simpson said earlier, if we cannot get to the bus, we cannot use it.

Expanding the bus network is not just a transport issue; we need to look at it on a cross-portfolio basis. It is a local planning issue, too, because we continue to build estates where there is no connectivity and a reliance on cars. If people have to walk to the edge of the estate in which they live and then further for the bus, and then have to sit on the bus while it goes all around the houses, they are not going to be enticed out of their cars.

That is just local travel. It would take hours and probably require a transit via Glasgow city centre to get from the side of the region where I live to where Graham Simpson lives. We also need better links with other forms of public transport.

**Graham Simpson:** Gillian Mackay makes an excellent point about the region that we both represent. I live at one end of the region and I think that she lives at the other end. For me to get to Falkirk from East Kilbride would involve several public transport legs, so I end up driving and wishing I did not have to.

**Gillian Mackay:** Absolutely—and that is in a region called Central Scotland. Out in the South of Scotland or more rural parts, as Christine Grahame has said, the problem gets even more magnified, with only single services available to get places. The same is certainly true across many bits of Central Scotland, too.

I raise those examples because they are in relatively urban areas. Linking with other forms of public transport and active travel is really important, too. For example, going from Grangemouth in my region to Polmont train station



is either a 10-minute drive on a bad day or a mile-and-a-half walk. However, those who want to travel on a bus have to get one from Grangemouth into central Falkirk, then have to go back out via Redding in order to get back to nearer Polmont train station—all for a mile of difference. Small changes to such links can lead to big changes to public behaviour patterns and we need that level of detail if we are to see buses as a real alternative.

I thank my colleague Mark Russell again for bringing this debate to the chamber and I look forward to working with members across the chamber more on the issue.

18:33

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank Mr Ruskell, a Mid Scotland and Fife member, for lodging this members' business motion, which I was pleased to sign. I thank him, in particular, for his and his team's steadfast support for the campaign to extend the current concessionary travel schemes to asylum seekers. The campaign, which was launched back in December 2021, currently has public support from, I think, every party represented in the Scottish Parliament, which is fantastic to see. Indeed, the Government has committed to exploring the possibility of implementing the policy in its programme for government, and for that, I and others are truly grateful.

The campaign focuses on one simple premise: the extension of the current concessionary travel schemes in Scotland to people who are seeking asylum and are subject to immigration control and who, as a result, are not able to access normal social security provisions or work to earn an income. It could not be any simpler than that, really. It has resulted in a pilot in Glasgow to evaluate the impact of such an extension, and we look forward to the outcomes of that.

The campaign also has the backing of third sector charities and organisations, including the Scottish Refugee Council, the Voices Network, Maryhill Integration Network and many others, from anti-poverty groups such as the Poverty Alliance to mental health organisations such as the Mental Health Foundation and faith leaders across Scotland. We have heard from people with lived experience of their trauma from dealing with this country's hostile asylum system and the impact that concessionary travel would have on their mental wellbeing, their ability to integrate into our society and the feeling of purpose and agency that they would subsequently have. It would be a real liberation psychologically and physically for thousands in Scotland.

When we started the campaign, we coined the slogan, "For such small change, it would make a huge difference", and we stand by that, because it is as true today as it was in December 2021. In the grand scheme of the Scottish Government budget, the costs are negligible, with implementation less than half a million pounds a year, or less than 0.1 per cent of the Scottish Government's annual budget.

Politics is about choices and priorities, and in today's society, in which the United Kingdom Government does everything in its power to use asylum seekers as a lightning rod for its failures across the public policy landscape, we in this Parliament have an opportunity to stand against such gratuitous and appalling demonisation. It is an opportunity for us all collectively to say that those people are our neighbours; that they are some of the most vulnerable people in the world and suffer significant trauma; that they are our friends; and, most important, that they are welcome here and should be given every opportunity to fulfil their potential as human beings and as citizens.

On that point, although it is essential to provide that access, we know that, for all citizens in this country, our bus service could do with being much improved. There are issues of cost that we need to look at carefully. In a cost of living crisis, many people are finding access to the bus system unaffordable, and nowhere more so than in Glasgow. I would just contrast the publicly owned system in Edinburgh, where the cost of a single bus fare is £1.80, with the privatised and unregulated system in Glasgow, where the fare is £2.65. Such a difference is unacceptable, and it is a measure of the failure of the 1986 deregulation and privatisation of the system.

I encourage the minister in his speech to make reference to chapter 2 of the 2019 act. We really need to get that activated, because it contains the provisions for franchising. Public control and extending ownership is one thing—and the arguments for it have been rehearsed in the chamber this evening, with the Conservative member for Central Scotland indicating that it would entail massive capital expenditure—but we could emulate, for example, Manchester, which had a breakthrough achievement when it re-regulated its system as of March 2021. It is the first region in the UK, I think, to do so since the 1986 deregulation was introduced.

What Manchester is hoping to do is take control of the fare box. If the regional transport authority can do that, it gets the private operators' attention, because it can compel routes, package routes to ensure that operators cannot cherry pick the profitable ones and ditch the loss-making ones, and bring coherence to the public transport

planning landscape. As has been discussed tonight, we have a form of lemon socialism whereby we privatise the profits and socialise the losses.

**Mark Ruskell:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Paul Sweeney:** Do I have time to give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Very briefly.

**Mark Ruskell:** I am enjoying the member's contribution about the benefits of franchising. Will he acknowledge, though, that what he is suggesting needs leadership not only from the Scottish Government but from councils? Councils need to engage with the Scottish Government and say that they want to use those powers and the community bus fund, and that they want to develop a vision, perhaps in the way that Andy Burnham has done in Greater Manchester.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Sweeney, could you respond slightly more briefly, and then conclude?

**Paul Sweeney:** Absolutely. I had a really constructive meeting with Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, which said that it might need additional legislation to safeguard its right to introduce franchising. Therefore, although the power in the 2019 act needs to be activated, we also need that collaboration with SPT and other transport planning authorities to ensure that we make the most of the opportunity. I invite the minister to refer to that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** So do I. Thank you, Mr Sweeney. I call the minister to respond to the debate.

18:38

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** I thank all members who have contributed. In particular, I thank Mark Ruskell for bringing the debate to the chamber. I also thank him for opening his speech by expressing such kind remarks about Kevin Stewart. I am sure that he spoke for all members in the chamber.

I hope that members will understand that I am responding to the debate in lieu of a serving transport minister, and I hope that I will be forgiven if, on occasion, I have to pick up specific examples and pass them to the new minister, when one is appointed. I hope that members will take this opportunity to shape the new minister's inbox before one has even been appointed by the First Minister and the Parliament.

We have to begin by acknowledging that all members recognise that buses provide an essential service. They not only give people

access to the services and facilities that they need, but reduce our carbon emissions, thereby helping to tackle the climate emergency. Bus services play a vital role in supporting delivery of the vision that has been set out in the First Minister's "Equality, opportunity, community: New leadership—A fresh start" prospectus.

I know that Kevin Stewart was delighted to speak at the Scottish bus week reception that Mark Ruskell mentioned. He met some of the "Love my bus" champions and was impressed by the appetite that was shown by everybody involved—in particular, those who had worked throughout the pandemic to keep essential bus services running safely—to innovate and respond to changing needs and demands.

While listening to some of the comments that were made during the debate, I was reflecting on people's appetite for saying what they need from bus services. Way back in the early days of social media, when Twitter was a nice place to be instead of the bin fire that it has become, I set up a better buses campaign. The idea was to get people to share their experiences of the bus services. I could tweet when I was on my way to meet First Bus in Glasgow and, by the time I got to its offices to have the meeting, 20, 30, 40 or 50 people were telling me about their experience of the buses. They gave praise and criticism. Criticism came when the services were not good enough, and praise was often given when a driver went out of their way to be extra helpful. People care about this; they have an appetite for bus services that meet their needs.

Members across the chamber picked up on many local issues, including short-notice cancellations and cuts to services being made when—as Katy Clark rightly said—we should be talking about an appetite for expansion rather than firefighting cuts, pricing issues, signage and so on. Several members made important points about accessibility. Paul Sweeney's speech focused on asylum seekers having access to buses and the transformational change that that could make.

Mark Ruskell called for conditionality in how the Scottish Government provides funding and support for bus services. I hope that the new transport minister will heed those comments and note how they have been made by members across the chamber. Mark Ruskell also recognised that Scotland already has one of the most extensive concessionary travel schemes. I hope that that is celebrated.

A couple of slightly more conceptual issues were raised. There was a question about personal preferences and whether people are too attached to their cars. Do we need to break that attachment or make bus services more attractive in a positive way? There might be a few irredeemable Jeremy

Clarksons out there, but there is a great deal of evidence that many people who drive want to drive less, and that others who do not have a car want public transport and active transport choices that work for them.

That is why the Scottish Government is committed to a long-term sustainable future for bus services in Scotland. Indeed, in the current financial year, it is providing £420 million support for bus services and concessionary fares. We are into phase 2 of the zero-emission bus challenge fund.

**Graham Simpson:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Patrick Harvie:** I will give way briefly.

**Graham Simpson:** The minister has mentioned fares a couple of times. There seems to be general agreement that we need simpler fares and, probably, lower fares. The Government has committed to publishing a fair fares review. Does the minister know when that will be published? It is long awaited.

**Patrick Harvie:** I am certainly eagerly awaiting it. It is very much part of the Bute house agreement that we negotiated. I am sure that the new transport minister will be keen to update Parliament on it as soon as possible.

The Scottish Government has a range of support in place. I mentioned the zero-emissions bus challenge fund of up to £58 million to support bus operators of all sizes to work collaboratively to make transformational change towards zero emissions the default choice for Scotland's bus services. Scotland's zero-emissions fleet is double that of England, so I am proud to say that, by launching the second phase of the fund, we will continue to see that number grow.

As everyone in the chamber will appreciate, improving journey times and reliability will also contribute to high-quality bus services and encourage motorists to get out of their cars and on to the buses. That is why we are investing in bus priority infrastructure through our bus partnership fund. Through that fund, £26 million of bus priority funding has already been provided to eleven partnerships covering 28 local authorities. The initial funding is for implementation of bus priority measures and to support local authorities, working with their partners, to identify and develop more projects for delivery.

**Paul Sweeney:** The bus partnerships may well be making progress, but I do not think that we are seeing good enough progress being made on bundling routes, fare capping, common livery or the critical control of the fare box. Does the minister recognise that those things can come only

with activation of chapter 2 of the 2019 act and getting the act fully firing on all cylinders?

**Patrick Harvie:** Indeed. If I can have a tiny bit of time to make up for that intervention, I will be able to come to that in a moment.

I will briefly touch on comments that were made about community transport organisations, such as the Glenfarg Community Transport Group. Community transport makes a major contribution to reducing isolation and increasing community access for people who would otherwise be unable to use conventional bus services, or where suitable services are too limited. The Scottish Government provides funding to the Community Transport Association to develop and advise the sector in Scotland. Community transport is just one part of the answer to Katy Clark's valid questions about public versus private provision. She assertively made the case for public ownership. Jeremy Balfour seemed to make the case equally clearly, but possibly accidentally. Either way, the Scottish Government's policies and plans continue to develop to give local authorities the flexible tools that Paul Sweeney has rightly said they need in order to address transport issues.

Through the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, local transport authorities have the power to run their own bus services. Further secondary legislation to allow bus franchising and partnership working will be introduced later this year.

**Christine Grahame:** Will the member take an intervention?

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

**Patrick Harvie:** As there is time for one more intervention, I will be happy to take it.

**Christine Grahame:** As long as the minister will not miss his bus.

I made the point that there is a family-owned bus company in my patch that is doing a jolly good job, so I would have concerns if the local authority were to take over running that bus service. In my view, there should be a mix. Lothian Buses is particularly good, but it serves a large urban area with a large travelling population. My area is not like that.

**Patrick Harvie:** We recognise that Scotland is not a single homogeneous entity; there are different needs in different contexts in various parts of the country, and we should take that into account. A point has also been made that, although buses that are run by the private sector might operate well in some places and badly in others, a great deal of their revenue and capital investment comes from the public purse. Mark Ruskell touched on conditionality and how we

make sure that we get good value for public investment, which will be critical regardless of whether services are run by the public sector, the third sector or the private sector.

We encourage local authorities to consider the range of powers that exist for them under the 2019 act and to make sure that they are used fully so that they can deliver good-quality bus services for local communities. In addition, the community bus fund will provide support for local transport authorities to assess the options to improve services in their areas. We are working actively with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other partners to develop the detail of that fund and to work on plans for its delivery.

During the debate, we have heard different views, but it is clear we have a shared understanding of the importance of having a modern, affordable and accessible bus service for all of Scotland. I thank Mark Ruskell for securing the debate in the chamber and members for their contributions.

*Meeting closed at 18:48.*

## Correction

Mercedes Villalba MSP has identified an error in her contribution and provided the following correction.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):**

*At Col 31, paragraph 6,*

*Original text—*

The minister has just described the UK Government's approach as an "act of sabotage", but it is this Government that is cancelling the scheme after spending £218 million—*[Interruption.]* Yes, the Scottish Government has spent £218 million—it is there in black and white on the Scottish Government's website—*[Interruption.]*

*Corrected Text—*

The minister has just described the UK Government's approach as an "act of sabotage", but it is this Government that is cancelling the scheme after spending £218 thousand—*[Interruption.]* Yes, the Scottish Government has spent £218 thousand—it is there in black and white on the Scottish Government's website—*[Interruption.]*

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

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