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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 1 May 2024

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

Portfolio Question Time

Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is wellbeing economy, net zero and energy. I remind members who wish to ask a supplementary question to press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question or to enter “RTS” in the chat function if they are joining us online.

Carbon Emissions Targets

1. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide further details of its reasons for removing its annual and interim targets for carbon emissions. (S6O-03356)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): As the member is aware, the Scottish Government proposed a 70 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, and a Scottish Labour amendment proposed a 75 per cent reduction, which the Climate Change Committee advised was likely to be unachievable. Although the cross-party ambition of Parliament was clear, there is no doubt that Parliament understood the scale of the challenge.

The Climate Change Committee has now firmly assessed that the target for 2030 is not feasible, which we accept in the challenging context of United Kingdom Government cuts and backtracking. Our current rigid linear annual target approach is not fit for purpose, it poorly reflects realities such as harsher winters and it does not allow precision when estimating the impact of developing technologies.

Katy Clark: In 2020, the Climate Change Committee wrote to the Scottish Government, saying that the interim targets were difficult but not impossible to achieve, and it outlined what needed to be done in order to achieve them. Does the minister not accept that the necessary action was not taken? Does he accept that we must now set out a plan to achieve the maximum reductions and

set out targets, given the climate emergency and its impact on humanity?

Richard Lochhead: It is really important that we all work together to look at the impact on humanity and, I hope, ensure that this Parliament unites around the measures that are required to reduce emissions and achieve our overall net zero targets in Scotland. I think that we can all agree on that.

All members are obviously aware that, when some proposals are made, political bandwagons are often suddenly created and parties jump on them, and that there is political opposition to some of the measures that we must take in order to reduce emissions in Scotland, whether those be low-emission zones or deposit return schemes. In my time in Parliament, the Government has made proposals on a whole host of issues that Opposition parties have opposed. It is very difficult to make progress under those circumstances. We have to unite where possible and move forward with the long-term targets and with our carbon budgets—which, of course, the rest of the UK follows—working together to achieve those ambitions.

Long-term Labour Market Strategy

2. **Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether its long-term labour market strategy is helping to make Scotland a fairer country. (S6O-03357)

The Minister for Energy, Just Transition and Fair Work (Gillian Martin): Although employment law remains reserved to the United Kingdom Government, we are promoting fairer work practices across the labour market in Scotland. Despite challenging conditions, the latest labour market statistics demonstrate positive progress on labour market inequalities, including the gender pay gap and the disability employment gap.

Our approach to employability aims to tackle inequalities in Scotland’s labour market by creating a system that meets the needs of employers and helps people of all ages who experience barriers to participating in Scotland’s labour market to achieve their potential. Our skills system will support those ambitions as we take the lead on national skills planning while strengthening regional approaches.

Marie McNair: The Conservative Party has accused people of overmedicalising the everyday challenges and worries of life. That comes from an extremely financially privileged individual who has never had to experience the worry and adversity that his party has forced on people up and down Scotland. How does the Scottish National Party Scottish Government intend to continue to protect

people from the worst abuses of Tory mismanagement?

Gillian Martin: I know exactly what Marie McNair is referring to. I was appalled by the language that the Prime Minister used. He talked about a “sick-note culture” alongside an anti-workers’ rights and anti-trade union agenda, which does nothing to support people accessing the labour market and does nothing for employers or for recruitment and retention.

By contrast, we, in Scotland, treat people with fairness, dignity and respect by developing a wellbeing economy and tackling structural inequalities. As I said, that means promoting fairer work practices across the labour market in Scotland through our approach to employability meeting the needs of employers and helping people of all ages who experience barriers and by working together to take down those barriers.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): A fundamental part of the Scottish Government’s labour market strategy and fair work policy is the promotion of the real living wage. I know that the Scottish Government wants all those who are engaging in procurement with the Scottish Government to pay the real living wage.

Last week, when members of this Parliament’s Economy and Fair Work Committee visited Glasgow Prestwick Airport Ltd—an institution that is wholly owned by Scottish ministers—we were horrified to find out that that institution does not pay the real living wage. When the minister talks about fairness, dignity and respect for workers, should she not begin at home?

Gillian Martin: I was not on that visit to Prestwick airport. Murdo Fraser raises an issue that I will feed back to the cabinet secretary and officials. Obviously, I will have to investigate that, as we need to investigate ourselves.

Small Vessel Replacement Programme (Direct Award)

3. **Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government, regarding its work to secure a sustainable future for Ferguson Marine, what discussions the net zero secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding potential plans for a direct award of the small vessel replacement programme contract to Ferguson Marine. (S6O-03358)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): As ministers have advised Parliament previously, a direct award of public contracts is possible only in strictly limited circumstances under public procurement rules. Ministers are currently evaluating the business case for the small vessel replacement programme, and all ministers with a

portfolio interest in the programme are connected to that in the normal way.

Graham Simpson: Before he was cruelly dumped, the former chief executive officer, David Tydeman, produced a series of investment asks of the Government, which could secure the yard’s future. That business plan went to the cabinet secretary—who is unfortunately not here today—on 5 April. How much is the minister prepared to invest to upgrade the yard, and does he foresee it getting any Government contracts soon?

Richard Lochhead: As, I am sure, Graham Simpson is aware, ministers have also informed Parliament that they are currently considering the business case for further investment. That is an on-going process within Government. Ministers are committed to updating Parliament as soon as there is any progress with that or any news to give to MSPs in Parliament. We are, of course, taking that seriously. We want to do everything that we can to support the jobs, but clearly we have to consider the business case that has been put forward, and Parliament will be updated in due course.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The minister said that a direct award is, under procurement rules, possible only in strictly limited circumstances. Can he say what those circumstances are?

Has the Scottish Government spoken to United Kingdom counterparts to ascertain whether the UK Government would support a direct order or whether the Subsidy Control Act 2022 would come into play?

When will we have a final decision on the award of that contract?

Richard Lochhead: The procurement law requirements under which a contract can be directly awarded are set out in the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2015. The question of subsidy control compliance also has to be considered separately.

Our consideration of a direct award has, to date, not necessitated engagement with the UK Government. Of course, that may arise—I cannot predict what the case will be. As I said to Graham Simpson, ministers are currently considering the issues and will update Parliament accordingly.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The minister referred to the subsidy control regime restricting potential state aid for investment at Ferguson Marine. One of the key asks in the investment plan is a new panel line. There are already two existing panel lines in Scotland—in Govan and Rosyth—as well as a third that is being installed in Belfast. Has he considered that a way around that restriction is to take a sector-wide approach and pool the

resources that are available in shipbuilding steel work across Scotland, to draw on for Ferguson Marine's future programmes?

Richard Lochhead: I will certainly draw Paul Sweeney's point to the attention of the cabinet secretary, and I am sure that it will be taken into account. All the issues are being considered at the moment. As I said before, a number of specific issues have to be considered in relation to the business case, and Parliament will be updated in due course.

Wind Farms (Support for Opposition)

4. **Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Minister for Energy, Just Transition and Fair Work has had with ministerial colleagues regarding any support that it provides to communities opposing onshore wind farm developments at public inquiries. (S6O-03359)

The Minister for Energy, Just Transition and Fair Work (Gillian Martin): The onshore wind sector deal in Scotland sets out that onshore wind developers will continue to collaborate with local communities in order to build good practices to enhance the existing good-neighbour approach through engagement at all stages of a project's life cycle, offering impactful community benefits and practical routes to shared ownership.

I can confirm that I have no discussions with ministerial colleagues regarding live applications. Scottish ministers have been fully co-operating with the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee regarding a live petition that seeks to increase communities' ability to influence planning decisions for onshore wind farms.

Oliver Mundell: The current process is far from fair or equitable, with local communities and residents facing aggressive and humiliating questioning from legal representatives who are desperate to deliver consent for their clients. Worse still, useful video evidence from past inquiries that shows such behaviour has been removed, which prevents scrutiny and denies new objectors the chance to familiarise themselves with the likely process.

Does the minister agree that local communities deserve legal representation when the process is clearly combative? Will she ask the DPEA—the planning and environmental appeals division—to look again at the decision to remove videos from its website?

Gillian Martin: Oliver Mundell has raised that matter in the chamber a couple of times, and I am aware of some of the issues that he has said that people have faced. The petition that I mentioned calls on the Scottish Parliament to appoint

“an independent advocate to ensure that local participants are not bullied and intimidated”

at local public inquiries. However, reporters are instructed to ensure that unrepresented partners are able to give their evidence in a safe environment. When unrepresented parties appear at an inquiry, reporters confirm at the outset of the inquiry that it is important that witnesses are treated courteously at all times, especially when being cross-examined. If any witness feels bullied or intimidated by the tone of cross-examination, they are advised to inform the reporter immediately.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): In the same vein, I have met many constituents near Newton Stewart in Dumfries and Galloway who have concerns about proposed wind farm developments in Glenvernoch and Blair Hill, which would lead to the tallest onshore turbines in Scotland, despite the region already having one of the highest levels of wind farm developments anywhere in Scotland.

I know that the minister cannot comment on live planning applications, but will she outline what action constituents can take to ensure that proposers adequately hear concerns and engage diligently with persons who oppose developments?

Gillian Martin: I confirm that applications for both proposals that Emma Harper mentioned have not yet been submitted to Scottish ministers. However, she is right that, even before that point, I cannot comment on the merit or otherwise of such proposals.

If a proposed development proceeds to the application stage, there are clear notification requirements to ensure that local communities and the general public are informed of the submission to Scottish ministers. Members of the public may make representations and comments to Scottish ministers on an application. When an application is ready to be determined, Scottish ministers consider all relevant material that is available to them before making a decision. However, I implore developers to have meaningful engagement with the constituents of Oliver Mundell and Emma Harper on all their proposals well ahead of that process.

Petroineos (Discussions)

5. **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what discussions it has had with Petroineos and trades unions about refining capacity at Grangemouth. (S6O-03360)

The Minister for Energy, Just Transition and Fair Work (Gillian Martin): The Scottish Government continues to engage extensively with

Petroineos. I most recently met the chief executive officers of Petroineos on 27 March, when I made clear the Scottish Government's commitment to continue to engage constructively with the business. Petroineos and trade unions are also members of the Grangemouth future industry board just transition leadership forum, which I convened on 28 March.

Ministers met Unite the union and the Scottish Trades Union Congress on the morning of the import terminal announcement. Outwith the Grangemouth future industry board, I met unions in Falkirk on 15 March at a Just Transition Commission round-table meeting, which included representation from the wider Grangemouth community, Petroineos, unions and the local authority. I will next meet Unite in June to further discuss this very important matter.

Daniel Johnson: I thank the minister for that detailed answer.

Here is what we know: the most recent accounts from Petroineos show that the site is profitable, and it has now secured investment in the hydrocracker, which was previously seen to be critical, but the plan to stop refining in 2025 is still in place.

What is the minister's understanding of what factors motivate the commitment to disinvestment? Has she discussed those matters directly with PetroChina, given that the Government has met it and it is bankrolling much of this, or, indeed, any other potential investors? Most critically, is the Government's objective to secure refining at Grangemouth beyond 2025 or simply to mitigate the effects of decisions that are being made elsewhere?

Gillian Martin: Mr Johnson has raised really important points. I have to point to the fact that Petroineos is making commercial decisions, and it has actually outlined them. It would not be fair to air in public what those commercial decisions have been based on because that is confidential.

One of the key aims of the Scottish Government, working in partnership with the United Kingdom Government and, indeed, the wider Grangemouth community, is to see how we can secure the refinery for the future. We are keen to look at whether it could become a biorefinery, and we are looking at ways in which we can influence the UK Government to bring down the hydroprocessed esters and fatty acids—HEFA—cap so that it could be one of the first movers in sustainable aviation fuel. That is one of the areas in which there are real opportunities for the refinery. Our colleagues at Petroineos agree with that, and we are working towards it.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Can the minister provide further information on how plans

to develop a specific just transition plan for the Grangemouth industrial cluster will help to secure a long-term, sustainable future for the area?

Gillian Martin: Our just transition plan for the Grangemouth industrial cluster will outline a first-of-its-kind vision for the site and will include the long-term net zero operations that we would hope to see take place by 2045, some of which I spoke about in my answer to Daniel Johnson's question. Beyond that, our plan will chart a series of actions that seek to secure that by focusing on securing long-term investment and developing technical and commercially viable solutions for manufacturing.

The necessary policy development as well as the skills and place-based activity that will be required to support a prosperous net zero future for the area are being developed with those who work in Grangemouth, communities, local employers, local authorities, unions and many other stakeholders.

Energy Efficiency Improvements (Due Diligence on Suppliers)

6. Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what due diligence is conducted by Home Energy Scotland when selecting recommended suppliers to install energy efficiency improvements that are supported by Scottish Government funding. (S6O-03361)

The Minister for Energy, Just Transition and Fair Work (Gillian Martin): Home Energy Scotland is not responsible for selecting or recommending installers of energy efficiency improvements. Applicants to the HES grant and loan scheme are required to use a microgeneration certification scheme-accredited installer for heat pumps and other renewables and a TrustMark-registered installer for complex energy efficiency measures, including external wall insulation.

HES recommends for all measures that householders contact at least three installers, ensure that the chosen installer is fully qualified, and seek a guarantee or warranty for the work carried out.

Craig Hoy: Across Scotland, many colleges are saying that they are unable to recruit enough apprentices to meet the forthcoming demand to deliver on the Government's insulation plans and its net zero objectives. Will the minister therefore speak to the Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans about reversing the funding cuts to Scotland's colleges, which will mean more cowboy operators operating in Government-funded schemes in Scotland?

Gillian Martin: I will tell Mr Hoy exactly what we are doing. We are working in partnership with the

sector to ensure that appropriate support and training provision are aligned at the local level with business needs and local demands. We have funded the green heat installer engagement programme to provide assistance and support for installers in their clean heat transition to become accredited for the installation of heat pumps. That included the MCS certification fund, which last year supported 24 businesses to become MCS certified.

The issue is of great importance. I have frequent conversations with Graeme Dey, who oversees what the colleges do. They are alive to the fact that a number of skill streams will have to raise their game and produce a prospectus that will meet the demand for future skills.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Energy Saving Trust administers the grant and loan scheme for Home Energy Scotland. I have heard from suppliers about delays in processing applications, and the knock-on effect is that delayed payments to the businesses negatively impact their cash flow. While ensuring due diligence, what can the Scottish Government do to improve the process so that local suppliers, which are often small businesses, can continue to support the on-going and necessary energy efficiency installations?

Gillian Martin: Our target is to always process Home Energy Scotland claims within 10 working days, once the required documentation has been received. We are aware that the majority of such applications are dealt with on time, but, as we roll out the scheme, a lot more can be done to ensure that any delays are investigated and that processes are developed that bring about improvement.

Net Zero Targets (Green Economy)

7. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what impact it anticipates its recent announcement on changes to its net zero targets will have on the development of a green economy. (S6O-03362)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): The need to amend the statutory trajectory towards our ambitious net zero target is driven by legal necessity. It follows all parties setting a target that was considered beyond what could reasonably be achieved.

Our recent announcements in no way detract from the scale of our ambitions for tackling climate change, including via our energy transition, which presents enormous economic opportunities for Scotland, as well as risks that have to be managed. We remain committed to realising those

opportunities for businesses and workers in Scotland, and to supporting a just transition.

Alexander Stewart: The Nuclear Industry Association has warned that Scotland's green economy risks losing billions in investment thanks to the Scottish National Party's short-sighted opposition to new nuclear development.

Now that the Greens are no longer in government, will the minister use the opportunity to consider nuclear power as a means of bolstering Scotland's green economy and strengthening energy security?

Richard Lochhead: Only a Tory could intervene by calling for there to be more attention and focus on nuclear when Scotland is in the middle of a green energy revolution in terms of jobs from offshore wind. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members!

Richard Lochhead: I draw members' attention to an edition of *The Press and Journal* from around a week ago, in which Ian Wood said that the decision on the offshore floating wind farm that has been given consent

"will unlock around £3bn of investment, generate hundreds of jobs and ... effectively result in Europe's first commercial scale floating wind development."

Phenomenal developments are happening across Scotland at the moment, so let us not waste time and resources on decades of lost opportunity by focusing on nuclear when we have an opportunity on our doorstep that is right before our eyes. Let us create the jobs in green energy and power ourselves towards net zero.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To deliver a just transition, we need to make sure that Scotland's workforce has the skills that are needed by industry. Approximately 80 per cent of the skills of workers in the oil and gas sector could be used in renewables, but demonstrating those skills is a challenge. That is why we support the development of an energy skills passport, but that has repeatedly been delayed. The former Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity said that a passport would be delivered this April, but April has gone and there has been no announcement.

Will the minister intervene urgently and work with trade unions, industry and skills accreditation companies to get a passport in place as soon as possible to open up opportunities for those workers in Scotland?

Richard Lochhead: The energy skills passport is a key building block in getting towards a just transition, and ministers have devoted a lot of resource and time to it. However, it is an industry-led initiative and, as Sarah Boyack is aware, it has

been quite a complex process. The good news is that we are expecting an announcement soon, so we will hear about the progress that is being made. It is an industry-led initiative, to which we have devoted resources because of its importance.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the minister agree that it is somewhat hypocritical of the Conservatives to demand more investment in net zero when the Conservative Government has cut our capital budget?

Richard Lochhead: John Mason makes a perfectly valid and powerful point. It is hypocritical of the Conservatives to cut Scotland's capital budgets at a time when we want to address the climate emergency and invest in the green energy revolution—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members—please!

Richard Lochhead: —and to then come here and complain about the lack of progress towards those targets. That is utter hypocrisy.

Common User Charge

8. Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the potential impact on hospitality and other businesses in Scotland of new post-Brexit import fees on food products, known as the common user charge. (S6O-03363)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): The United Kingdom Government recently published its common user charge fees for Government-run border control posts in England. Currently, there are no Government-run BCPs in Scotland, but it is anticipated that that charge sets a market price signal, and Scottish traders who use English ports will clearly be affected.

We will of course monitor any impacts on businesses and consumers, including those in our important hospitality sector.

Collette Stevenson: Household budgets have been decimated by the cost of living crisis, Liz Truss's mini-budget and Brexit. Now, people are facing fees of up to £145 on items such as fish, cheese and yoghurt. What steps is the Scottish Government taking, with the powers that it has, to mitigate the harms that are being inflicted on the people of Scotland?

Richard Lochhead: I heard Conservative members sigh when Collette Stevenson mentioned the impact of UK Government policies on hospitality businesses in Scotland. I remind them that the business insights and conditions survey stated that the top factors affecting businesses are inflation and energy costs, both of

which are at the door of the UK Government at the moment—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please resume your seat for a wee second, cabinet secretary. I will not have all this shouting across the chamber. The minister has been asked a question and he is responding. Please have the courtesy to listen to his response.

Richard Lochhead: Colette Stevenson is quite right. Recent press reports have highlighted concerns that an increase in costs will lead to a further price increase for consumers who are already struggling with the cost of living crisis. It is entirely because of Brexit that the latest raft of import controls has been introduced. Scotland did not vote for Brexit, but we are paying a huge price. Although no one can point to the benefits of Brexit, this issue demonstrates yet more unnecessary damage being caused to the Scottish economy because of it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on the portfolio of wellbeing economy, net zero and energy. There will be a short pause before we move to the next portfolio to allow front-bench teams to change positions, should they so wish.

Finance, Deputy First Minister Responsibilities and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is finance, Deputy First Minister responsibilities and parliamentary business. Should a member wish to seek to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or, if online, enter the letters RTS in the chat function, during the relevant question.

Capital Spending Review

1. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on when its review of capital spending will be complete. (S6O-03364)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): The capital outlook is currently very challenging, with a 9 per cent real-terms cut in our capital funding from the United Kingdom Government. Work is under way to update the infrastructure pipeline to ensure that it is affordable and deliverable and provides the best value for money.

Rhoda Grant: In the Highlands, a number of health projects have been paused, including the maternity services upgrade, the new Belford hospital for Fort William and the Caithness health redesign. During the pause and delay,

construction costs are increasing, which is not only adding greater costs to the investment but creating greater costs for NHS Highland, because it must manage the failing infrastructure. When will the review be complete? What will be the value of the projects that get the go-ahead, and what will be the value of the projects that are scrapped?

Shona Robison: I very much understand the issues that Rhoda Grant has raised. However, given not just the cut to our capital budget but the significant levels of construction inflation, there has been a reduction in our spending power on top of the capital cut, so we have had no other choice than to revisit the pipeline of projects.

As I have said to Rhoda Grant in the chamber previously, and as I said in my initial answer, work is under way to review the programmes that relate to the 2021 infrastructure investment plan, to ensure that it is affordable and deliverable and provides value for money. The refreshed infrastructure pipeline is intended to be published alongside the medium-term financial strategy, as it is right that future investment plans are embedded in wider thinking on fiscal sustainability. That will include reference to the health projects that Rhoda Grant has mentioned.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The bus partnership fund has been paused, despite local transport authorities spending a lot of time and money working up bids worth hundreds of millions of pounds that are clearly linked to the Government's strategy for hitting net zero and getting people out of cars and on to public transport. How will the Government prioritise that? Will the Deputy First Minister give an indication of when the bus partnership fund will resume?

Shona Robison: The bus partnership fund sits in the Cabinet Secretary for Transport's portfolio, but it is clear that support for the expansion of public transport is a key lever in our ambitions towards net zero.

Alex Rowley referred to prioritisation. In the light of the construction costs and inflation that I mentioned, the cut to our capital budget and the further cut to financial transaction availability, we have had to make very difficult decisions in the capital priorities work that is going on—work not just on the infrastructure investment pipeline but across the whole Government. That work is under way, and, when a new First Minister comes into post, I am sure that they, too, will have a view on those priorities.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Two weeks ago, I asked the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care when we might know more about the timetable to replace Shetland's Gilbert Bain hospital. He acknowledged that certain parts of the 1950s-designed building

are in a bad state. In the light of the capital spending review, and as the Gilbert Bain hospital is one of the oldest hospital buildings in the Highlands and Islands, will the Deputy First Minister do all that she can to ensure that progress towards a replacement hospital is forthcoming?

Shona Robison: I will ask the health secretary to write to Beatrice Wishart. What I said to Rhoda Grant about the infrastructure investment pipeline and the reasons why we are revisiting it, which are multifaceted and include the rise in construction costs and the cuts to the capital budget, applies to all those projects.

I understand Beatrice Wishart's, and Rhoda Grant's, point that giving certainty as early as possible is very important, which is why the refreshed pipeline will be published alongside the medium-term financial strategy.

Public Sector Pay Disputes

2. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on work undertaken to resolve any public sector equal pay disputes. (S6O-03365)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government has a long-standing commitment to the principles of fair work, and the fair work action plan outlines the direct action that we are taking to address labour market inequalities. All public bodies and local authorities need to ensure that they comply with their legal obligations; they are encouraged to work jointly with their trade unions in undertaking equal pay reviews and equality proofing their pay systems.

Maggie Chapman: Pay discrimination appears to be endemic in local government. The GMB union has active equal pay cases in six local authorities, including Dundee City Council. Job evaluation is an on-going issue in Glasgow, and a local authority contracting company used by Dundee, Angus and Perth and Kinross councils uses discriminatory practices. Today is May day, international workers day. Will the Deputy First Minister agree to meet the GMB union to discuss the issues that its members face and agree to support the development of a strategy to deal with pay discrimination in local government?

Shona Robison: I thank Maggie Chapman for raising these important issues. She will be aware that, as councils are independently accountable bodies and employers, it is their duty to ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010. We recognise the need to move forward on these issues. Our negotiation and on-going dialogue with the trade unions is important to us, but we have to ensure that, where there are contractual and

employment-related issues, they remain between the trade unions and the respective employer—in this case, local authorities.

We recognise the importance of local government funding in that context and of local authorities being able to take the steps that they need to resolve the equal pay claims. With that in mind, the 2024-25 Scottish budget provides record funding for local government of more than £14 billion, which represents a real-terms increase of 2.5 per cent.

I would be happy to discuss these issues further with Maggie Chapman if she would like to do so.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): What would the Deputy First Minister say to the leader of Dundee City Council, who continually refuses to meet the GMB or, frankly, to answer correspondence from parliamentarians on the pay dispute? I draw the chamber's attention to my declaration of interest as a member of the GMB.

Shona Robison: First, I know that the leader of Dundee City Council takes such matters very seriously and values very much the relationship with the trade unions. I remind Michael Marra that, in relation to one of the biggest equal pay claims, in Glasgow, it took a change of administration—from Labour to the Scottish National Party—to begin to resolve such matters. There is no lack of willingness and desire to resolve equal pay claims on the part of the SNP, whether that is in local government or anywhere else.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I make a plea for succinct questions and answers, because we still have quite a number of questions to get through.

Local Government Debt

3. **Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that local government debt has now risen to 160 per cent of its annual funding settlement. (S6O-03366)

The Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning (Joe FitzPatrick): Although there are no limits on the amount that a Scottish local authority can borrow, local authorities are under a statutory duty to determine and keep under review the maximum amount that they can afford to allocate to capital expenditure, including associated borrowing levels. Local authorities must have regard to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy prudential code, which requires borrowing to be “affordable, prudent and sustainable”. Regulations also require local authorities to set an authorised limit for external debt.

Sue Webber: Given the shocking rise of local government debt and the risk of it spiralling further, can the minister confirm what contingency plans the Scottish Government has made in the event of a local authority going bankrupt?

Joe FitzPatrick: It is not possible for there to be no impact on capital borrowing from the cuts that have been made to our capital budget by the United Kingdom Government, if we want to continue running some of the services that are provided.

As we are talking about councils going bankrupt, I note that no council in Scotland has gone bankrupt, and the latest report suggested that none is likely to. That is in huge contrast to Conservative-controlled England, where there have been 12 section 114 notices, in eight councils. Those are not just Labour councils. There was Northamptonshire County Council, twice; Croydon Council; Slough Borough Council; Nottingham City Council, again; Croydon Council, again; Northumberland Council; Croydon Council, again; Thurrock Council; Woking Borough Council; Birmingham Council; and, most recently, Nottingham City Council, again. The Scottish Government will keep doing what it can to support and work with our local authorities, and the UK Government should start doing the same with its local authorities.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the minister say anything about the private finance initiatives and public-private partnerships that put local authorities under huge pressure and impacted on their debt?

Joe FitzPatrick: John Mason makes a very strong point. The private finance initiative was an expensive Labour and Tory mistake that simply did not deliver best value for the people of Scotland. PFI and PPP unitary payments place significant pressure on local authorities. There are 38 local authority PFI contracts, and £7.25 billion has been paid on those up to this year, with a further £8.15 billion of payments to be made over the coming years. That is £15.4 billion of payments for local authority contracts that have a capital value of only £3.27 billion.

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I recently attended an event hosted by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and discussed the priorities that were set out in its five-year plan in 2022. They include securing sustainable funding, delivering a just transition and supporting the most vulnerable in our communities. Given the financial pressure that is being faced by our councils, can the minister advise what measures the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that those goals are met?

Joe FitzPatrick: That is an area that the Scottish Government is working on constructively with COSLA. No one is coming to the chamber to suggest that there are not pressures on local government's finances, just as there are right across the public service. That is why this Government took decisions to increase the amount of spending power that it had. I hope that progressive colleagues across the Parliament will continue to support such policies to ensure that we can prioritise public services over the kind of tax cuts that the Conservative Government makes.

Ferries Task Force (Update)

4. The Deputy Presiding Officer: To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the work of the ferries task force with Orkney Islands Council, including when it expects new ferries to be procured. (S6O-03367)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The Deputy First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Transport met the new deputy leader of Orkney Islands Council on 18 April. They reiterated the Scottish Government's commitment to support the council in its work to develop a robust business case for the ferry replacement, which can then inform the council's decisions on its next steps. It was also confirmed in that meeting that the Scottish Government has maintained almost £16 million-worth of support for the operation of Orkney's ferries in 2024-25, in a very challenging financial context. We are also continuing to provide additional island cost crisis emergency funding to the council this year.

Liam McArthur: When the previous First Minister stood down last year, the work of the ferries task force came to an abrupt halt for around six months. Given the urgent need to move ahead with the procurement of new vessels to operate the lifeline routes in Orkney, can the minister guarantee that the latest departure from Bute house will not result in the ferries task force being stuck in dry dock again for the remainder of the year?

Jim Fairlie: I can absolutely confirm to the member that the work is progressing at pace. If he wants to come and have a briefing with me or with the transport secretary, I will be more than happy to oblige.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The national shipbuilding strategy refresh in 2022 outlined a 30-year pipeline of all public sector vessel procurements and committed to having a minimum 10 per cent weighting on social value for all new vessel competitions. Can the minister confirm that, in the case of this programme, the Government will adhere to the 10 per cent minimum threshold on social value and perhaps even go further and be more ambitious, as Maritime UK has called for?

Jim Fairlie: The transport secretary will write to the member with an answer to that question.

Economic Recovery (Tax Revenue)

5. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what the implications are for future tax revenue of reports that the economic recovery outlook for Scotland continues to lag behind the United Kingdom average. (S6O-03368)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): Despite being tied to the failing UK economic model, the Scottish economy, far from lagging behind the UK, is one of the best-performing parts of the UK. Scotland, unlike the UK, avoided entering recession in 2023. Earnings in Scotland grew by 8 per cent in 2023, which is faster than in any other part of the UK, including London and the south-east, and income tax revenues are growing faster in Scotland than in the rest of the UK.

Douglas Lumsden: The latest Scottish Government report shows that growth in Scotland's economy for 2025 is expected to be 1.1 per cent; in the rest of the UK, growth is expected to be nearly double that. Does the cabinet secretary agree with me that that failure by the Scottish Government will mean an even bigger black hole for our budget in future years? What actions is the devolved Government taking to have growth levels that are comparable with those in the rest of the UK?

Shona Robison: I know that the Conservatives find it difficult to welcome any good news about the Scottish economy. In my initial remarks, I laid out some of the areas in which the Scottish economy is outperforming the UK, in terms of strong earnings growth and record income tax receipts.

We are absolutely aware of the need for our economy to grow. Scotland's gross domestic product per capita has grown faster than that of the UK since 2007, and productivity has grown at an annual average rate of 1 per cent a year in Scotland since 2007, compared with that of the UK at 0.4 per cent a year. Inward investment projects in Scotland have grown by 3.3 per cent, compared with a 6.4 per cent fall across the UK.

We absolutely want to make sure that we have a growing economy and we have strength in many areas, not least in net zero. It is just a pity that the Conservatives continue to talk down the Scottish economy.

Income Tax Divergence (Impact on Private Sector Recruitment)

6. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has

undertaken of how income tax divergence has impacted or may impact private sector recruitment. (S6O-03369)

The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur): Our tax policies are grounded in evidence and we regularly monitor data on the tax base throughout the year, as well as engaging with business organisations to understand the trading conditions that they face. The latest data from His Majesty's Revenue and Customs shows that the number of payrolled employees in Scotland has grown to a near record high, while separate HMRC research has recently shown that Scotland has attracted thousands of taxpayers from the rest of the United Kingdom since 2017-18. That is contributing to record income tax receipts, with Scottish income tax now forecast to raise around £18.8 billion in 2024-25.

Jamie Greene: The minister is keen to quote figures that are four years out of date. Since then, we have seen massive tax hikes in Scotland. He talked about evidence and data. Well, here is some evidence and data. Someone who earns £50,000 or more in Scotland will pay 20 per cent more tax than they would in any other part of the UK. It is not a sustainable position that that is not affecting the private sector's ability to recruit. Every commentator says it—the Institute of Directors, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, Scottish Financial Enterprise and even the Scottish Fiscal Commission are warning of the effect of tax divergence on recruitment. Will the minister not accept that the business sector is telling us and the Government that Scotland's increased tax levels are hammering its ability to recruit people to well-paid jobs in Scotland?

Tom Arthur: I will start with a point of consensus. It is exceptionally important to engage with business and to work constructively in a shared endeavour for economic growth.

Here is where I take a slightly different view. First, the most recent data that we have to base our assumptions on is from 2021-22, and it shows that there was net positive migration to Scotland across all income tax bands.

Secondly, it is important to look holistically and in the round at, for example, the significant divergence in average property prices in Scotland from those in the rest of the UK and the significant difference in average council tax compared to the rest of the UK. If a young professional is fortunate enough to be in the position of earning £50,000 a year and they have been through an undergraduate university course in Scotland, unlike their counterparts in England they will not be carrying the better part of 30 grand of tuition fee debt.

Across a range of measures, we use our progressive income tax policies in Scotland to deliver a competitive environment as well as the best social contract that is on offer anywhere in these islands.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Opposition members often highlight concerns about the potential impacts of Scotland's progressive tax system. Can the minister say any more about what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the recent HMRC research, which indicates that thousands more taxpayers have moved to Scotland than have left each year in the period after Scottish income tax was introduced?

Tom Arthur: The reality is that, ever since income tax was first devolved, Opposition parties have claimed that even the slightest policy divisions would lead to an exodus from Scotland. Recent HMRC research dispels that. Growing numbers of taxpayers are leaving the rest of the UK for Scotland, with net in-flows averaging 4,200 taxpayers each year between 2017-18 and 2021-22. In the last year for which there is available data, taxable income grew by around £200 million due to that movement of taxpayers. I will leave it to others in the Parliament to explain how slashing taxes and running down public services would make Scotland a more attractive place to live.

Local Government Funding

7. **Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether it has funded local government adequately to deliver the services that it has responsibility for. (S6O-03370)

The Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning (Joe FitzPatrick): The Scottish Government recognises the challenging financial circumstances that local authorities and, indeed, the entire public sector are currently facing. Those challenges were considered and were reflected in the local government finance settlement, which is providing local authorities with record funding of more than £14 billion in 2024-25, which is a real-terms increase of 2.5 per cent compared with the previous year. It is the responsibility of individual local authorities to manage their own budgets and to allocate the total financial resources that are available to them on the basis of local needs and priorities.

Carol Mochan: Councils and residents in South Scotland and beyond are feeling the true impact of successive SNP budgets, backed up by the Greens, that have taken the axe to council funding and services. Does the minister understand the level of cuts in local authorities that his Government has imposed on the poorest

communities in Scotland? Is it not the case that Scotland is now suffering from two out-of-touch, out-of-road Governments that it would be far better off without?

Joe FitzPatrick: No, I do not agree. We have just heard about the number of local authorities that have had to serve section 114 notices in the rest of the UK, where the SNP is not in Government.

I will talk about the rises that have come to South Scotland in comparison with the 2023-24 budget. In Dumfries and Galloway Council, there is a 5.7 per cent increase; in East Ayrshire Council, there is a 5.2 per cent increase; and in East Lothian Council, there is an 8.5 per cent increase.

I see that time is running out, Presiding Officer.

In Scottish Borders Council, there is a 6.2 per cent increase; in South Ayrshire Council, there is a 6.7 per cent increase; and in Midlothian Council, there is a 7.6 per cent increase.

We all recognise that these are challenging times for everyone in public service, but it is absolutely clear that the Scottish Government has prioritised local services and local government to the best of our ability.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have two requests for supplementaries. I intend to take questions from both members, but they will need to be brief.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Last year, the Scottish Government made a commitment, via the Verity house agreement, that it would introduce multiyear funding for council budgets, and, in November, Shirley-Anne Somerville made that commitment for the voluntary sector. I ask again, when is that going to happen?

Joe FitzPatrick: The member will not, I think, find any division across the chamber on the importance of multiyear budgeting. However, that is absolutely impossible given the volatility of the current system in which the UK budget comes solely in-year for us, with no certainty and no multiyear aspect. It is absolutely something that this Government would want to take forward, but we would need to do so in partnership with local government and the UK Government.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): With the Scottish Government providing record funding of more than £14 billion to local authorities, as has just been mentioned, can the minister provide any update regarding the work that is under way to empower local government, including a new fiscal framework?

Joe FitzPatrick: Work on the fiscal framework is really important to the Scottish Government, and it is being taken forward as part of our collaboration with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. We are working closely with COSLA to agree a local framework. We published an update just last December, and we are working towards the fiscal framework being in place, subject to that collaboration, in advance of the 2025-26 Scottish budget.

Bute House Agreement

8. Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): To ask the Scottish Government whether it still plans to deliver the shared policy programme contained within the Bute house agreement, in light of reports that many of its policies have been discarded. (S6O-03371)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): The Bute house agreement played a central role in our aim of building a greener, fairer and independent Scotland. It made possible a number of achievements, including delivering a progressive project that prioritised the national health service and public services over tax cuts; free bus travel for under-22s; bringing ScotRail into public ownership; and committing the first £75 million of the 10-year just transition fund for the north-east and Moray.

However, the First Minister, for the reasons that he set out last Thursday, took the decision to end the Bute house agreement. Any policy decisions will be notified to Parliament in the normal manner.

Ash Regan: What is the point of the current First Minister dramatically chucking the Greens out of the front door only for the next one to sneak them in round the back?

Shona Robison: The Government will get on with governing as a minority Government and, in doing so, we will reach out to those who share our progressive values and who want to work with us in a constructive manner. That will be the case for the Opposition parties across the whole Parliament. The question for them is whether they can rise to the occasion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on finance, Deputy First Minister responsibilities and parliamentary business.

Motion of No Confidence

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-13005, in the name of Anas Sarwar, on a motion of no confidence. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons. I call on Anas Sarwar to speak to and move the motion.

14:55

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I start by recognising the significant announcement that Humza Yousaf made this week—that he was resigning as First Minister. Although he and I have significant political disagreements, it is important to take a moment to thank him for his public service, which has included 12 years as a minister, and I wish him and his family the very best for the future.

However, for me and Scottish Labour, it has never just been about one person. Neither has it been just about the past 17 years of Scottish National Party failure. More significantly, it is about the present and the future. Now, more than ever, our country needs credible and effective leadership and stable and competent government to take on the twin crises that are facing our nation—an economic crisis and a national health service crisis. I have no confidence in the SNP's ability to deliver that, which is why I have brought the motion to Parliament today.

The motion of no confidence in the SNP Government is based on two principal arguments. First, it is now clear that the SNP, as a political party, is so chaotic, divided and dysfunctional that it cannot deliver competent government and is failing Scots every day. I do not believe that that will change if the SNP purely changes the face at the top.

Let us look at the two candidates who are being suggested: Kate Forbes and John Swinney. There are already SNP ministers briefing journalists that, if Kate Forbes was to become leader, they would actively look to stop her from being able to form a Government, and that would mean even more chaos.

John Swinney is the man who has been at the heart of the SNP Government for the past 17 years and the heart of the SNP leadership for the past 40 years, the finance secretary who broke the public finances, and the worst education secretary in the history of the Scottish Parliament. That is hardly the competence or the change that our country needs.

Secondly, it is about the democratic deficit. It would be untenable for the SNP to impose yet

another unelected First Minister on our country, especially in these circumstances. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Sarwar.

Anas Sarwar: Let me remind the chamber what Nicola Sturgeon said when Rishi Sunak replaced Liz Truss as Prime Minister. She said that we could not have a “revolving door” at Downing Street, that the office of Prime Minister was not the plaything of one political party and that it would be a democratic outrage if the leadership selection did not go to an election for the people to decide. If that is the principle that the SNP rightly applies to Westminster and the United Kingdom, why does it now hold Scotland and this Parliament to a lower standard?

I know that SNP members will point to Vaughan Gething as First Minister in Wales or other examples, but it is important to recognise the difference. Leaders stating that they will not complete full terms or leaving due to deeply personal circumstances and having a managed and orderly transition is very different from two leaders leaving in controversy and chaos.

For the second time in as many years, we have scandal, incompetence and political self-interest, with the SNP putting party before country and imposing its choice on the people of Scotland. It should be for the people to decide who leads our country; there should not be a backroom deal, a stage-managed coronation or a decision made by a small group of SNP members.

I think that the similarities between the UK Conservative Government and the SNP Scottish Government are now clear to see. The two political parties are both chaotic, divided, dysfunctional, unleadable, ungovernable, incompetent, distracted by internal wars, distant from the people's priorities and unable to fix the mess of their own making. Both are looking to pitch community against community, both are entrenched in the politics of division and both are unable to meet the ambitions, hopes and aspirations of the people.

That is why our country is crying out for change. Yes, people want rid of this rotten Tory Government across the UK, but they also want to move on from this dysfunctional and incompetent SNP Government here in Scotland. That is why we need an election—so that the people can decide. It is getting clearer and clearer by the day that only Labour can deliver the change that Scotland needs. *[Interruption.]*

I can hear that SNP members do not agree, but that is because they have stopped listening to the Scottish people: the people who are struggling in a cost of living crisis, who need a Government on their side, focused on jobs and lowering bills; the people who are languishing on NHS waiting lists,

who need a Government that will renew and reform our NHS; the people who are stuck in temporary accommodation, with record levels of homelessness, who need a Government that is focused on building new homes; the people who worry about their children's future, who need a Government that will raise education standards and bring opportunities to every community; and the people who can see the huge potential of Scotland being squandered by two incompetent Governments, who need a Government that believes in economic growth and is willing to work with business.

It is now clearer than it has ever been that it is time for the people of Scotland to have their say. It is time to elect a Government that is capable of delivering on the ambitions and hopes of every person in our great country. That is why I have no confidence in this SNP Government. I have no confidence that it can deliver the stability and competence that we need. That is why it is time for change.

I move,

That the Parliament has no confidence in the Scottish Government.

15:02

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Presiding Officer, as this is my first opportunity to do so since my announcement on Monday, I begin by putting on record my thanks to you for the job that you have done in overseeing proceedings in the chamber throughout my tenure. That said, I am afraid that, with this First Minister shortly leaving Government, you might have one more raucous back bencher to manage.

I also thank Anas Sarwar for his kind remarks at the beginning of his speech. I thank everybody across the chamber, many of whom have sent me kind messages over the past 24 and 48 hours. I have to say that getting so many kind messages from the Opposition has unnerved me ever so slightly.

However, let me concentrate on Anas Sarwar's remarks. He started his speech by saying that, for him, this is not personal, but he then launched an attack on John Swinney and Kate Forbes. Even by Anas Sarwar's standards, that is the fastest Labour U-turn that I have ever seen.

Throughout his speech, Anas Sarwar spoke about members of this Parliament being "unelected". Let us be absolutely clear: every single member of this Scottish Parliament—SNP, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Conservative, Green or Alba—is elected. Let us not cast any doubt on that. When it comes to attacking my colleagues John Swinney and Kate Forbes, I remind Anas Sarwar that, when they put themselves up for the

vote—when they put themselves up for the people's verdict in the constituencies that they stood in—they won, unlike Anas Sarwar. Let us not talk about unelected versus elected: everybody here is elected.

We know that the motion of no confidence today will be defeated. That gives me the opportunity to talk up our record and this Government's considerable achievements, and to point out Labour's lack of substance and its hypocrisy.

As I have found out only too well in the past few days, politics is definitely about the choices that we make. As for the Government, I am exceptionally proud of our choices. Where the Westminster consensus—Labour and the Tories—has chosen Brexit, Scotland chose to remain in the European Union.

Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer chose to retain the two-child limit and the rape clause. The SNP Government opposes those. Labour chooses to lift the cap on bankers' bonuses but not the cap on child benefits. The SNP chooses differently.

Sir Keir Starmer—who, of course, Anas Sarwar answers to—chooses to commit to Tory spending and tax plans. Those plans mean that the wealthy will benefit from a tax cut, while the NHS and other public services are slashed to the bone.

We choose progressive taxation to increase investment in the NHS and public services. We choose to launch a 10-year just transition fund to support Scotland's drive to net zero, when Labour chooses to ditch its £28 billion green energy pledge. Whereas Keir Starmer refused for months to call for an immediate ceasefire, even failing to condemn the collective punishment of the people of Gaza, I and the Government that I lead chose to be a voice for peace and humanity in the world.

Yes—those are just some of the choices that I and members in the seats behind me are so proud of. What about the results of those choices? Attainment in Scotland is at a record high and record numbers of students from deprived areas are entering our universities. This Government's actions are lifting an estimated 100,000 children out of poverty this year. We continue to be the top destination for foreign investment outside London, and more people are coming to Scotland from the rest of the UK than are leaving—yet no one, but no one, in the Opposition thinks about pausing for a second to ask why.

Could it have something to do with the very choices that this SNP Government has made? Could it have something to do with choices such as the baby box, expanded childcare, free university education, free prescriptions; free nursing and personal care; free school meals, no bridge tolls, no hospital car-parking charges, free bus travel for under 22s, those with a disability and

those over 60, the game-changing Scottish child payment and so much more? All those were delivered because of the choices that we have made—all because of our record. All those were done in the face of 14 years of Tory austerity, a Brexit that we did not vote for and a Westminster cost of living crisis that we did not create but as a result of which our people are suffering.

Yes, I am proud of the record of the Government that I have the honour of leading, at least for a little while longer.

As I reflect on my time as First Minister, as it comes to an end, I remind the chamber what I said when I first became First Minister. I promised that my door would always be open. I promised that I would listen to good ideas that came from across the parliamentary chamber. I have to say that, in that whole time—the 13 months for which I have been blessed and lucky to be First Minister—I have not heard a single positive idea from Anas Sarwar or the Labour Party. That is clear from this afternoon's debate.

However, what I have heard is the deafening sound of principle after principle being thrown out of Anas Sarwar's window: U-turning on the two-child cap, U-turning on devolution of employment law, U-turning on devolution of drug law and U-turning on his support for the WASPI—Women Against State Pension Inequality—women.

We on the SNP benches will leave Labour to justify all that, if it can. We will never do anything other than stand by our values—by Scotland's values. The true vote of no-confidence that the people of Scotland really need and deserve is a vote of no confidence in this failing miserable union that is holding Scotland back and inflicting damage on the people and the economy of this country. The cosy Westminster alliance that is represented here today is terrified of such a vote. Why? It is because it knows what the result will be. So, I urge the chamber to reject the motion and to let us start focusing on the real priorities of the people of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. I call Douglas Ross.

15:09

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a personal level, I wish Humza Yousaf well, as he prepares to leave office. It has been clear that I have disagreed with many of the policies that he has introduced in his time, but he has served our country as First Minister for a year and in Government for more than a decade.

It has also been very clear, during his time in office and particularly in his resignation statement on Monday, that family is important to him—it is

integral to everything that he does. Although he will have reflections and, I am sure, regrets over the coming months and years, I know that he will take comfort in being able to spend more time with the family that he cherishes—one that is going to get bigger in a few months. We wish him well for that, too.

Scottish Conservatives will vote in favour of the motion today. We want the SNP Government to be removed and will look to use every opportunity to do that.

However, Labour has failed to build the majority that it needs in Parliament to achieve that. In contrast, my party's vote of no confidence in Humza Yousaf was successful. Humza Yousaf has announced that he is resigning from the office of First Minister. It was the Scottish Conservatives who built a parliamentary majority to force him out.

That is what a strong Opposition can deliver, and that is just the first step. We want to get rid of the entire distracted and divided SNP Government, and the upcoming general election will be a chance to deliver another blow to it. In seats across Scotland, only the Scottish Conservatives can get rid of the SNP—just as we are getting rid of Humza Yousaf—and get the focus back on the priorities of people right across the country.

As we look ahead to the interim period and at where we are now, the would-be successors to Humza Yousaf are hardly rushing off the blocks to seize the poisoned chalice and lead the SNP. However, two names for who might take over are being mentioned. It is interesting to see that both are creeping a little further towards the front bench, and are ideally placed for us today, one behind the other, so I am sure that the cameras will get a great shot of them.

It looks as though Nicola Sturgeon's health secretary will either be replaced by Nicola Sturgeon's deputy or Nicola Sturgeon's finance secretary. What does that say about the current Scottish Government? Each individual on the front bench today, handpicked by Humza Yousaf to run departments of the Government, has ruled themselves out. They do not want to do it. Never mind the Opposition having no confidence in the Government: it seems that none of the Government ministers has confidence in themselves.

The front runners, though, represent continuity. Kate Forbes ran Scotland's economy when it lagged behind that of the rest of the United Kingdom. Her budgets put up taxes on Scottish workers and failed to pass on vital relief to Scottish businesses. Kate Forbes has said that she wants to hold an independence referendum within three months of a general election. She is an even more

radical nationalist than Humza Yousaf or Nicola Sturgeon.

Then there is Honest John. If he is successful, Scotland faces—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Ross, we do not use nicknames in the chamber.

Douglas Ross: I am sorry—I thought it was about accuracy, because it would be “Not-so-honest John”, given some of the things that we have heard recently.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Ross! *[Interruption.]* Mr Ross, I ask you to apologise then continue. *[Interruption.]*

Douglas Ross: Then there—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Ross, apologise then continue. *[Interruption.]*

Douglas Ross: Then there is John Swinney. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Mr Ross. You might not have been able to hear me. I would be grateful if you would apologise, then continue.

Douglas Ross: I will apologise. I am very sorry for any hurt caused.

If John Swinney is successful, we face the dreadful prospects of Nicola Sturgeon’s prodigy being replaced by Nicola Sturgeon’s right-hand man; of going from the man who ruined Scotland’s NHS to the man who ruined Scotland’s education system; and of going from one failed leader to a leader who has already failed.

Whichever nationalist wins, we already know that they will obsess about independence. Scotland will remain the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom for workers and businesses. One in seven Scots will remain on an NHS waiting list. Scottish education will continue to fall down the international rankings. Dualling of key roads including the A9 and the A96 will continue to be delayed. Police numbers will continue to drop and dangerous criminals will be let off with reduced sentences.

Whether we have a bitter battle or a cosy coronation to elect the next leader of the SNP, the SNP will continue campaigning for independence, and the Scottish people will continue to be failed by it.

15:14

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): As I have already said to the First Minister personally, the events of the past week are a source of regret but certainly not of hostility or ill will at a personal level. Today, it is appropriate to acknowledge the human impact of political life. For Humza Yousaf,

that impact was shown most clearly in a moment of immense dignity, when global political events were impacting directly on his family. He rightly gained huge respect for speaking out for and, in many cases, humanising the people of Gaza and humanising the victims of collective punishment in a way that no other national leader that I can think of was able to do. For that, and for a great deal more, Humza Yousaf is due respect and thanks—and he is due all of our thanks for his service to the country.

Others may have a very long list of grievances; they may have an implacable hostility to everything that the First Minister, the SNP or the Bute house agreement represents. For the Greens, the reason why we were unable to have confidence in the First Minister personally was his decision to needlessly end the progressive pro-independence majority Government. It is to his credit that he has taken personal responsibility and announced his resignation. I do not celebrate that in any way, but I believe that it was necessary.

In light of that decision, a vote of no confidence in the First Minister personally would have been performative and petty, and I welcome the fact that the motion has been withdrawn. However, a vote of no confidence in the Scottish Government as a whole betrays the true motives of others—chaos for the sake of chaos. Let us just consider what would happen if the motion were passed. We would have a month to seek another Government, an election around the time that voters across the country were heading off on their summer holidays and a new Government formed perhaps by August, leaving—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members.

Patrick Harvie: If members will permit another viewpoint to be heard, I say that that would leave little more than a year and a half until the legally required dissolution for the 2026 election.

In that time, what would happen to the legislation that is urgently needed? The Housing (Scotland) Bill, which contains measures on homelessness prevention and long-term rent controls, has just been introduced. We need a climate reset following the admission that Scotland is years behind where we should be on emissions cuts. One of the few areas of climate policy that have been praised in the past couple of years is the heat in buildings programme. Legislation on that will be needed soon if that is to be completed in time to accelerate the emission cuts from a previously neglected sector. All that and much more would be delayed. Then, after less than two years, we would have yet another Government with a different policy agenda altogether, potentially.

Fixed-term Parliaments are intended to give stability, and they have done so in contrast with more than a decade of chaos in Westminster politics. *[Interruption.]* It should be clear to everyone that both Labour and the Conservatives do not want stable self-government for Scotland. The Greens do.

We already had the best option—a stable, progressive and pro-independence majority Government—and I regret that it has not been allowed to continue. The Government will no longer be a majority Government, but minority Governments can work. It has happened before and it can happen again. It is not beyond the ability of any political party in the chamber to work constructively in that context, if it chooses to do so.

However, a minority Government must reach out and bring together a majority in Parliament. For that to happen, it will need to remain a progressive Government. We need a reset on climate; an acceleration of emission cuts, not defeatism; a bold commitment to equality, not a shabby compromise with the nasty, divisive culture war mentality that we see elsewhere; and continued redistribution, which will be all the more important if an incoming UK Labour Government carries out its threat to stick to Tory fiscal rules, which will mean even more austerity. That progressive agenda is still capable of providing stable government for Scotland, instead of the chaos that the Labour motion seeks.

15:19

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Politics can be ugly, and never more so than last week. However, I must pay great tribute to the First Minister: in a moment of great stress, he made a speech of great dignity and grace. It was a resignation speech that all of us, had we been in such a situation, would have wanted to make. That is a great tribute to him. Personally, I have always found him a very warm and generous individual, with a great smile and a sense of humour. I congratulate him and Nadia, who are soon to be parents again—if he thought that he was going to escape the sleepless nights, I think that they are about to come back with a vengeance.

It says something that the leadership of the Conservative Party is more stable than that of the SNP. I am old enough to remember when Nicola Sturgeon was First Minister. It is good to see her back in her place this afternoon. I do not know whether she wants to make an intervention in relation to a contribution that she made before, when she said:

“The governance of any country cannot simply be a revolving door that one party gets to pick time and time again who occupies the highest office in the land.”

I do not know whether she resiles from those remarks, but I am sure that the chamber would welcome her updated commentary on whether there should be an election now. I think that it is worth considering, which is why we will support the motion of no confidence. I note that Nicola Sturgeon is not rising to her feet. I suspect that she is, quite smartly, ducking that one.

My second reason for supporting the motion is that this Government is fond of saying that it is the best—the best in the UK. However, I do not think that “the best” is how you could judge the view of the single mother in my constituency who went without food in order to pay for her private dental bills because she could not get an NHS dentist; or that of the elderly man I met who was wincing with pain because his hip operation had been delayed once again; or that of the classroom assistant who was right in front of me with a broken wrist because she had had a violent incident with a pupil in a class; or that of the islanders who are desperately waiting for a reliable ferry service. They are not saying that it is the best, but this Government is riddled with complacency. It believes that, because we are marginally better on some occasions than the Conservative Government, we should somehow be grateful for the performance of this Government. That is the second reason why we need a renewed mandate for this Parliament and why we should have an election.

I am a big fan of Jamie Hepburn—many people have heard me talk about him before. He toils away on his own in private with his civil servants, crafting document after document that absolutely nobody reads; nevertheless, we have to give him credit for that. I want to release Jamie Hepburn from the endless torture of that responsibility. For that reason alone, I am sure that everybody would agree that we should have an election.

I never thought that I would ever say the words, “I agree with Ash Regan,” but her comment earlier that, “We chucked the Greens out the front door to sneak them in the back door,” is the fundamental problem with this Government. Either it heals the rift with the Green Party or it heals the rift with the public, and it cannot do both. That was Humza Yousaf’s view last week: that the Bute house agreement could not continue and was dragging down the SNP, and that that break was therefore needed. However, the SNP needs the majority, and that is why it needs the Greens. It is therefore not possible for the SNP to have a mandate in this Parliament, and so that needs to be renewed.

For all those reasons—for the revolving door, for the belief that it is the best, for the case of Jamie Hepburn, if nothing else—but also to heal the rift, we need to have an election.

15:23

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I used to think that there really was nothing new in politics, but I have to say that the current period of chaotic government is exceptional, whether at Westminster or at Holyrood. We have had a ringside seat, observing the trauma experienced by the current UK Government. First, it was Boris Johnson, but partygate was his undoing. Then we had Liz Truss for all of 50 days, which resulted in interest rates rising and mortgages spiralling out of control. Now we have Rishi Sunak presiding over the country's continuing decline. The last two were, of course, appointed by the Tory party and not elected by the country. The parallels with the current SNP Government are self-evident. With the SNP, we are about to have a third leader in as many years. The last two were elected by their party, not by our country.

The people of Scotland deserve to be heard, and I am not alone in that thinking. Here is what others had to say when Rishi Sunak was elected:

"It shouldn't just be down to Tory MPs and Tory members to pick the next prime minister."

That was Ian Blackford on 22 October 2022.

Then, we have this comment:

"He should call an early general election. He is the second person in a row to be appointed as Prime Minister by the Tories, not elected by the population. The idea that he can go two years before seeking or winning a democratic mandate, I think, is just unthinkable."

That was Nicola Sturgeon on 24 October 2022. So, it is unthinkable. Is Nicola Sturgeon now wrong? Given that we face exactly the same situation in Scotland, the SNP should at least be consistent and agree that democracy demands a Holyrood election.

What has the SNP got to fear? Is it worried about the verdict of the people of Scotland—their verdict on one in six people being on an NHS waiting list and not one of the SNP's targets to end long waits being met? There has been a 10 per cent increase in the number of drug deaths, and 10,000 people are waiting on social care assessments and support. The economy is weak, struggling to gain traction, and growth is stagnant. Funding for colleges and universities has been slashed, affecting the very future of our young people. The number of homelessness applications is increasing, with rough sleepers back on our streets, and there is a record high number of households, particularly those with children, in temporary accommodation. There is a housing emergency, but the SNP slashed the housing budget by £190 million. Of course, climate targets have been weakened and scrapped.

That is a record of shame. It is a record of failure. People are tired of two Governments that

are failing them. They want change. They want a Government that is focused on their priorities—on the NHS, on the economy and on education. Instead, we will have another SNP contest for the next First Minister. There will be more division, more acrimony and more anonymous briefings from cabinet secretaries, but there will be zero focus on the things that matter to the people of Scotland. It is time for a Holyrood election. It is time for change.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S6M-13005, in the name of Anas Sarwar, on a motion of no confidence, 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.

15:27

Meeting suspended.

15:30

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on motion S6M-13005, in the name of Anas Sarwar. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not work. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Ms Gilruth, I can confirm that your vote was recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysool (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD) Proxy vote cast by Willie Rennie
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)

Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 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)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-13005, in the name of Anas Sarwar, is: For 58, Against 70, Abstentions 0.

Motion disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a short pause before we move to the next item of business.

Women's State Pensions (Compensation)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-13041, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on Women Against State Pension Inequality. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak button now or as soon as possible.

15:34

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): I will undoubtedly miss being in the Government. It has been my life for almost the past 12 years. However, there will be some silver linings. The first, of course, is the time that I will be able to spend with my family, although I have to confess that my 15-year-old daughter Maya did not look overly excited by that prospect.

The second silver lining is that I will be able to dedicate more time to my constituents and my constituency. A part of my constituency that I share with Nicola Sturgeon is Govan, which is where the Mary Barbour statue is located. That monument was a very fitting end point to a march and rally that was organised by the WASPI women in 2019, which I had the pleasure of attending, alongside my daughter Maya. I took Maya to that march and rally not just to tell her about the injustices that have been done to the WASPI women, but to show her the hundreds and thousands of women who are standing up not only for their own rights but the rights of all women and girls, regardless of their age.

The injustice that has been done to the WASPI women is undoubtedly a gender injustice. There is no doubt in my mind—none whatsoever—that if men had been treated in the same way and had had their hard-earned money taken away from them, with little or no choice and no notice, not only would there have been an outrage but—crucially—the Westminster establishment would have found a solution.

For years, the pleas of the WASPI women have fallen on deaf ears in the corridors of Whitehall. They have been ignored by the United Kingdom Government, ministers, the Treasury and virtually every member and department of the UK Government. Any other campaign, or any other campaigners, might have simply run out of steam and given up due to the intransigence of the political establishment at Westminster, but not the WASPI women. A number of those incredible women are in the public gallery today, just behind me. They should be commended and applauded for not taking no for an answer. I say thank you to

the WASPI women for their tireless efforts. *[Applause.]*

The WASPI women have pursued every avenue possible to demand their rights, and I am pleased that the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman has agreed that the WASPI women have been wronged and deserve justice. Let me be clear: the Scottish Government does not just support the WASPI women's right to justice—that, of course, we do. We support their calls for compensation, too.

The PHSO report, which was finally published on 21 March after far too long a wait, criticises the handling of the Department for Work and Pensions communications on the equalisation of the state pension age for men and women, and it calls for the women who have been impacted by those failings to be compensated to the value of between £1,000 and £2,950. That is level 4 of the six levels of compensation that are available to the PHSO.

However, the Scottish Government recognises the WASPI campaign's call for the highest level of £10,000 or more to be awarded, to properly reflect the harm that has been caused to those women over time. The Scottish Government will do all that it can to demand that Westminster does the right thing and fully compensates the women whom it has wronged.

It is deeply disappointing that I have yet to receive a response to my letter to the Prime Minister and to Sir Keir Starmer, in which I stated that the current—or, indeed, any future—UK Government must take action immediately to compensate the women who have been impacted. I look forward to the chamber uniting in agreement on righting an historic injustice. I note that all party leaders in this Parliament have pledged their support to the WASPI campaign and have committed to compensation for the WASPI women.

Although the recent commitments of Labour and the Conservatives to the triple lock are critical, it would be a complete abandonment of the WASPI women if neither Rishi Sunak nor Keir Starmer pledged to deliver compensation to the women who have been affected. Although—frankly—I would expect the Conservatives to shirk their responsibilities, for Labour to do the same is unforgivable. Labour politicians have taken great delight in turning up at photo calls with the WASPI women, wearing the purple sashes and promising to stand in solidarity with the women who have been impacted, but it is not pictures or warm words that the WASPI women want; they want justice and compensation.

If Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves—the woman who is likely to be the next UK Chancellor of the

Exchequer—continue to turn their backs on the WASPI women by refusing to commit to compensation, it would be an absolute betrayal, for which they should never be forgiven.

The Scottish National Party-led Scottish Government has always supported the WASPI campaign, and we will always seek to do so. I was delighted to attend the WASPI gathering on 18 April in the Parliament and to talk to the WASPI campaigners, which I had the pleasure of doing before this debate, too. Each of the women—women who wanted to spend this chapter of their lives free of any financial worries—has a story.

To Anne, Kathy, Rosie and the many other WASPI women whom I have had the privilege of meeting, I say that your tireless campaigning has most certainly inspired not only me but politicians from right across the spectrum. Let me be very clear: on reaching this important milestone in your journey for justice, my colleagues and I—this Government—will stand shoulder to shoulder with you until compensation has been paid in full.

We also support SNP MP Alan Brown's bill, which is currently making its way through the UK Parliament and calls for the UK Government to compensate women who were born in the 1950s. I hope that Tory and Labour politicians here, who will stand up shortly and tell WASPI women that they support their campaign, will put their money where their mouth is and that they will use any influence that they have, regardless of how small it might be, in their own parties and demand that their leaders in London do the right thing and compensate the WASPI women in full. Let us hear no more excuses about how tight money is—we know how constrained the finances are, but this is about priorities.

The PHSO report makes it clear that

“finite resources should not be used as an excuse for failing to provide a fair remedy.”

We agree. With each day that passes without justice, the financial harm that has been done to the women impacted increases.

Of course, with the passage of time, more and more of the women affected will not live to see justice. The WASPI website has two counters on the home page: one keeps a tally of the number of WASPI women who have died without receiving justice or compensation, and the other shows the total amount that the Treasury has saved through the disgraceful actions of the Westminster Government. This morning, those counters showed that 277,389 women have died without being given compensation and that the Treasury has disgracefully benefited to the tune of £4 billion.

In Scotland alone, 336,000 women have been affected. In total, they are owed between £300

million and £1 billion by the UK Government just for the compensation that the PHSO has recommended. That amount would be even more if it reflected the WASPI campaign's assessment of the harm that has been done.

A survey of 8,000 WASPI women that was carried out in autumn last year found that 70 per cent of WASPI women had reduced their weekly spending and had cut their food shop in the past six months. The UK Government needs to step up and take responsibility for its failure to properly communicate the changes that have so adversely impacted those women. If the uncaring and uncompassionate UK Government is not willing to do the right thing, a potential future Labour Government must stop the dithering and delay and commit explicitly to full compensation for the WASPI women—and it should do so now.

As I stated at the outset of my speech, this is a monumental failing of the UK Government's own making. WASPI women maintain that they do not argue against equalisation in principle. However, the UK Government's approach to the equalisation of state pension age was badly communicated from the beginning and led to millions of women across the UK being unfairly penalised.

As I said earlier, I have written to the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition regarding the issue. In my letter, I provided a copy of a letter from Anne Potter, the co-ordinator of WASPI Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Dunbartonshire and Renfrewshire, who is known to many members across the chamber. In that letter, Anne references the historic injustice that the millions of women and their families across the UK have faced throughout the WASPI scandal. More pertinently, she makes the point that that can be overcome by politicians doing the right thing and working together.

If nothing else, we—all of us—owe that to those who have already passed away without receiving so much as an apology, let alone justice or the compensation that they deserved.

Let the voices in the chamber unite. Let them be unequivocal in their cry—no ifs, no buts, no maybes—that the UK Government, current or future, must deliver fair and full compensation to all the women who have been impacted.

I can give WASPI women a personal promise. Be it from the front benches or the back benches, they will always have my unwavering support and admiration. I thank all the incredible and unrelenting WASPI women for fighting not just for themselves but for my daughters.

It is with great pride that I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the report from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman into the pension injustices on women born in the 1950s; agrees that

the UK Government must now urgently deliver on the ombudsman's recommendations to pay compensation in full to those women without delay; echoes the Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) campaign's calls for a higher level of compensation to properly reflect the financial harm; notes the report's conclusions on the UK Government's failings of communication and maladministration; congratulates the WASPI women on this milestone in their campaign, and highlights cross-party commitments to delivering justice for them all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise members that we have absolutely no time in hand this afternoon, so speeches will need to adhere to the time limits.

15:45

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The First Minister began with reflections on a constituency case and a constituency campaign, and I will do the same. I want to put on record in this Parliament that I thank and pay tribute to Sheila Forbes from Lossiemouth, who has been spearheading the campaign for WASPI women in Lossie, in Moray and in many parts of Scotland for many years. Her tireless efforts deserve recognition. Indeed, I had a surgery just a few weeks ago in Lossie and an issue about WASPI women came up, which I wrote to the Department for Work and Pensions about, and Sheila's name was mentioned. Throughout some difficult times for the WASPI campaign and some divisions within it, Sheila has remained resolute in standing up for the women in Moray and wider communities who have been and continue to be affected by this issue, and their friends and family.

As the First Minister said, people who started out on this journey are no longer with us, and the campaign for justice for WASPI women is not just for those who remain campaigning—I welcome the campaigners who are in the gallery—but for those who fought this battle but, sadly, did not see justice.

I come to the motion for debate and my amendment. The motion was lodged yesterday, which was after the First Minister wrote to party leaders to speak about the new approach that we have to take, and, indeed, after the speeches that he made at the weekend. I hope that, on reflection, he might see nothing that he can disagree with in my amendment. That has certainly been my intention.

In this new era of minority Government, there is an opportunity for this Parliament to debate—

The First Minister: Will Douglas Ross give way?

Douglas Ross: I will give way if I can finish this point. There is an opportunity for Parliament to debate these important issues and work across the parties to have a discussion about the motions

that we are lodging and the outcomes that we can have as a Parliament. The First Minister might reflect throughout this debate on the contributions that members make and consider accepting my amendment, the wording of which particularly focuses on the PHSO report.

It is crucial that we consider issues in relation to the PHSO report and the wider campaign, but today we can have a very strong voice in the Parliament about the recommendations, including compensation for women who are affected by the changes and the maladministration that has clearly been identified in the report, while also considering the wider challenges that are faced by the bigger campaign. It has taken five years for the PHSO to conclude its report. That is a huge amount of work. I want to see those recommendations listened to, taken on board and acted on by the UK Government. We can send a united voice from this Parliament on that issue.

I give way briefly to the First Minister.

The First Minister: I thank Douglas Ross for taking an intervention. It is important for us to work collaboratively. That also means being up front and honest with the campaigners and the public more generally. Can I get this on the record from Douglas Ross and understand it, because I have no doubt that he has read the PHSO report in detail? Does he believe that the current UK Government should be paying compensation to the WASPI women who have been affected—yes or no?

Douglas Ross: Yes—I do, and that is what I have said. In fact, my amendment states that the UK Government should urgently address and respond to the recommendations of the PHSO report,

“including the recommendation to pay compensation to those affected”.

The First Minister asked me a yes or no question, and the answer is yes.

I have been supporting WASPI campaigners in Moray, and in the House of Commons, with their campaign. They deserve justice, and part of the road toward justice involves taking the recommendations from the report and delivering on them. However, timing is crucial. In my letter to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, I urged him and the UK Government to respond to the report as quickly as possible. In his response, Mel Stride said that the UK Government is considering all of the recommendations, including the recommendation to pay compensation.

The First Minister was correct to say that this issue is not and should not be political. Members of every political party—individually, at a local level, or nationally, in Parliament—have raised the

issue time and again. I pay tribute to Carolyn Harris, from the Labour Party, who co-chairs, with my Conservative colleague Tim Loughton, the UK Parliament all-party parliamentary group on state pension inequality for women. The Conservative MP Peter Aldous raises this issue time and again. On behalf of the SNP, Patricia Gibson recently challenged the UK Government to respond to the report and the recommendations contained in it as a matter of urgency. The WASPI women have managed to get people from across the political spectrum to listen to their issues and concerns. Crucially, the PHSO—which is non-partisan—has listened to them and has accepted that there was maladministration.

It is important to remember that the report could not look at whether it was right to change the state pension age for women. I agree with the First Minister: no WASPI women that I have ever met have been against equalisation; the issue has been how that was communicated. From the very first moment that I spoke on this subject, I have raised concerns about how it was communicated. Based on the summary of the complaint and the findings of the report, there is no doubt that there was maladministration. The report states clearly, “That was maladministration. That was also maladministration.” The maladministration has rightly been brought to the fore in the comprehensive report, which requires thorough discussion, debate and a response from the UK Government. That is why the amendment that I have lodged echoes much of what the First Minister put forward in his motion, but in a way that we can all support.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, I hope that in his reflections, the First Minister will consider—today, of all days, and given the words that he and the Deputy First Minister used about the Parliament working together—that perhaps he and the Scottish Government can accept our amendment, so that the Parliament sends a united voice that we support the efforts of WASPI women and that we want to see the recommendations of the report promptly responded to by the UK Government.

I move amendment S6M-13041.2, to leave out from “the UK Government” to end and insert:

“this is a substantial report, which specifically considered the communication of changes about the state pension age for women by the Department for Work and Pensions; calls on the UK Government to respond in full to the substantial report by the ombudsman and recommendations contained within it as quickly as possible, including the recommendation to pay compensation to those affected, and congratulates the WASPI women and campaigners for their individual and collective campaigns on this issue over many years.”

15:53

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome this debate, and I take the opportunity to join colleagues in saying to the First Minister that I wish him well after the past week. Indeed, it is nice to debate with him again. It is possible that we last did so when he was the health secretary and I was a shadow health minister. Perhaps we will have more time in the future to debate issues across the chamber.

I note what he said in his speech about this being a gendered issue. I also note what Douglas Ross said about the timetabling of the debate being quite rushed. I hope that we will soon have time to debate toxic masculinity, which was intended to happen in this slot. Those issues are important to women and girls, and they are important to men across the country, who can reflect on their responsibilities.

As I often do in debates, I will begin by pointing to the consensus in the chamber. We have already heard about the experiences of our constituents who are WASPI women. Scottish Labour welcomes the publication of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman’s report. The PHSO has produced an incredibly detailed and serious piece of work. It fully merits and must be given thoughtful and purposeful consideration, and action is required.

The report lays out clearly that there were failings in communications about changes to the state pension age. Labour opposed it when George Osborne took the decision to accelerate increases in the state pension age without giving sufficient notice to the women who were affected—an action that has, rightly, angered them.

On behalf of my party, I say to all WASPI women, including those who are in the gallery today and whom we represent, that we thank them for their efforts and congratulate them, as the Government’s motion does, on the work that they have done to bring the report to this point. Indeed, I have had the opportunity to talk to many impacted constituents and WASPI campaigners, including recently at the drop-in event that the First Minister referred to, which I thank Clare Haughey for arranging.

The PHSO has been clear that it is now for Government to respond, and that it must do so at pace. WASPI women have been waiting long enough, so the current UK Government must set out how it will take forward the recommendations and next steps. I have to say that the current UK Government has been slow to act on a range of injustices, whether that be the Post Office scandal or the infected blood scandal, which members will know are serious concerns of injustice at this time.

Although we appreciate that there is a process to be gone through and detailed work to be done, it is clear that the work and pensions secretary and the Government must respond with speed, because people have waited too long. Very often, on other issues, as I have mentioned, that slowness to act can cross the line into what feels like apathy and a lack of feeling towards those who are victims of those injustices.

It is crucial that we listen to the experience of those women who have fought and campaigned over many years and who have been seriously impacted by these issues. The Government needs to take the responsibility to engage with them and other stakeholders on how it will address the findings.

Let me be absolutely clear—*[Interruption.]* Labour supports the delivery of justice for WASPI women, but we have also been absolutely clear—*[Interruption.]*

The First Minister's photo has appeared on the screens in the chamber. I assume that that means that he wishes to intervene. I am not sure when that photo was taken, but he certainly does not look like that at the end of the week that he has had—he may in the future. *[Laughter.]* I will give way.

The First Minister: Putting that photo up is an awfully cruel thing to do—it is adding insult to injury. Actually, it was only yesterday that that photo was taken. *[Laughter.]*

In all seriousness, the point of consensus between Paul O'Kane and I is that nobody is arguing about the maladministration and the bad communication from the UK Government. There is also no disagreement between us about the fact that the Conservatives are unlikely to act. The WASPI women whom I met this afternoon had a very clear question. It was no different to the question that I asked Douglas Ross. If there is a future UK Labour Government, can Paul O'Kane commit that it will pay compensation—let us not argue about the level of compensation—to the WASPI women affected if the Conservatives do not act? Yes or no?

Paul O'Kane: I had that conversation with WASPI women in this very Parliament at the event that I spoke about, and Labour is very clear that we support the principles contained in the PHSO report, which includes the principle that we must compensate those women. The First Minister says that we do not need to talk about the level of compensation, but his motion speaks quite specifically about the level, so we have to reflect on that as well. *[Interruption.]* I think that I have been clear that we are in support of the principle of compensation, so I am not quite sure—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr O'Kane, could you resume your seat for a second? Members—we have listened to all the speakers so far with courtesy and respect. Can we continue in a similar vein?

Paul O'Kane: Thank you.

It was important that the WASPI women who are listening in the gallery could hear what I just said, instead of the barracking that we had from the back benchers, who clearly want to make this a political issue about the Labour Party.

As I have said, Labour supports the delivery of justice for WASPI women, but we are very clear that we need to ensure that WASPI women are part of that process and that any system of compensation is designed with those women in mind and that they are around the table when those decisions are made, because the ombudsman has made a number of recommendations about how any such system might work. Of course, it could involve blanket compensation or it could be about looking at individual cases, and I know that there is a variance of views among women on what should be done.

I am conscious that the Deputy Presiding Officer is looking at me to wrap up. There have been a number of exchanges. However, as I said at the outset, I am clear that Labour will support the WASPI women, support the outcomes of the recommendation in the report and support pensioners more widely, through the triple lock and other measures that we will seek to take.

I move amendment S6M-13041.1, to insert at end:

“notes the work of UK Parliament Select Committees to scrutinise the UK Government in response to the report; reiterates calls for the UK Government to publish its response to the findings of the report without delay; acknowledges the current dire state of the UK Government's finances, due to the unfunded spending commitments of Liz Truss; notes the lack of action by the UK Government regarding compensation that is still owed to individuals as a result of other scandals, such as the infected blood and Windrush scandals; believes that there must be clarity on how any compensation scheme would operate; acknowledges the need for any credible government to only make spending promises that it knows it can deliver and pay for, in order to maintain wider economic stability; endorses the Labour Party's calls for a clear system for notifications about any future changes to pensions, and supports the commitments from any incoming UK Labour administration to give pensioners greater security and stability through committing to the pension triple lock.”

15:59

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Every 13 minutes, a WASPI woman dies. Every 13 minutes, a woman who might have lost

several years' worth of her pension—maybe as much as £42,000—dies without justice. As a result of changes that were made in the Pensions Act 1995 that were designed to equalise pensions, women who were born in the 1950s have lost out, with as many as 3.6 million women affected. That number includes at least 23,000 women in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

None of those women disagrees with the pension equalisation. They do, however, disagree with the unfair way in which the changes were introduced. Significant changes to their pension age were imposed without widespread consultation, with little or no notice, and much faster than they were promised. Some women have been hit by more than one increase, with subsequent pension changes in 2011.

As we have heard, in March this year, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman ruled that the UK Government had mishandled changes to the pension age, leaving many of those women facing hardship.

Until the 1990s, many women were not allowed to join company pension schemes and, because they did not have time to plan for the pension changes, they are now struggling to make ends meet. Many of the women who are affected started working before equalities legislation came into place in the 1970s. Many were forced to leave work if they got married, and many did not get maternity pay if they had children. Older women are now often unable to find appropriate jobs, and many cannot work, as they are carers for other family members or they have their own health conditions.

The WASPI women have been subjected to systematic discrimination, and the pension fiasco is just the latest example.

It should also be noted that many older women who are in receipt of either a salary or a pension tend to spend that money in their local economies. Therefore, it is not just the women and their immediate families who have lost out and suffered; their wider communities—our communities—have, too.

In its recent report, the PHSO also said that the affected women should be paid up to £2,950 each by way of compensation for the hardship that they have faced because the UK Government had mishandled changes to the pension age and the maladministration had left many of them facing hardship. WASPI women and probably many of us in the chamber think that the level of compensation that has been suggested is, to quote a WASPI woman,

“a slap in the face”.

It is appalling that the DWP, which was responsible for the maladministration, has said that it will not pay out even that measly amount. As Linda Carmichael, who is co-chair of WASPI Scotland, has said,

“an apology doesn't pay the bills.”

After the publication of the PHSO report, another WASPI campaigner, Lorraine Rae, said:

“We are pleased that, after a long wait, we have been vindicated and have achieved a moral victory. But we must now also be compensated financially for the losses we suffered ... We now require compensation without a protracted period of debate and stalling, during which many more Waspi women will die before receiving what they are due.”

I pay special tribute to Linda Carmichael and Lorraine Rae for their tireless work in Aberdeen and, indeed, to all the phenomenal WASPI women campaigners across Scotland. I know that they will not let up in their fight for fair and fast compensation. We should all be able to stand in solidarity with the WASPI women—our mothers, sisters, carers, neighbours and friends—in their fight for justice.

In closing, I am pleased to reaffirm my and the Scottish Greens' unwavering support for the WASPI campaign. We believe that the WASPI women should have fair and fast compensation, and we urge the UK Government to act quickly to prevent any more damage to WASPI women.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that we have no time in hand. Members will therefore need to stick to their speaking time limits from now on.

16:04

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to debate the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's recommendations.

As deputy convener of the Scottish Parliament's cross-party group on WASPI, I recognise the hard work of all those who have been involved in the campaign. In case it is not obvious, I should confess that I am a 1950s woman, too.

I have friends and family—as I am sure colleagues across the chamber do—who have been affected by the decision to increase the state pension age. As the First Minister said, it was never about the equalisation, but about how it was done. There is a distinct feeling that a lack of fairness is involved, and a sense that the goalposts were moved without women being informed. We can debate whether that would ever have happened if we were talking about another group in society, but a combination of misogyny and ageism resulted in older women being

overlooked by grey suits in Whitehall. It is little wonder, therefore, that older women feel invisible in our society.

The term “WASPI” quickly became a catch-all for all the various groups that have campaigned about the lack of notice with regard to increasing the state pension. The WASPI campaigners have only ever asked for fairness and for injustices to be rectified. Sadly, some of those campaigners have passed away and will not see the justice that they sought.

The irony is not lost that WASPI women are from the generation that campaigned for women’s rights. We should not forget that the rights that women have today are, in no small way, due to the women who were born in the 1950s. Maternity pay and maternity leave were not available to women who had their children in the 1960s and early 1970s, and when they came to retirement, some women made decisions about their future, such as offering childcare for grandchildren, only to find, cruelly, that financially they would not be able to do so. They have had to continue to work or take additional part-time, often low-paid jobs simply to survive the years when they thought that they would have their state pension.

Close the Gap’s briefing reminds us that there is a “gendered” element to pension inequality. Women are likely to take on more caring responsibilities, with interruptions in their careers, which reduces their opportunities to contribute to pension savings. Women are living longer and are more likely to live in poverty after retirement, with less savings than men. Close the Gap highlights that

“Two-thirds ... of pensioners in poverty are women, and half of pensioners in poverty are single women”.

I am quite sure that WASPI women know the reality of that.

The ombudsman’s report has been a long time coming, and the process needs to be moved along to ensure that those who are affected finally get compensation. I urge the UK Government to act on the ombudsman’s report, and I encourage whichever party forms the next Government after the general election to make the issue a priority. It should be remembered that this will not simply involve an outgoing from the Treasury—there will be returns to local economies and national taxes from compensation payments.

The 1950s women whom we have been talking about were among the first to vote at 18. They saw several waves of feminism and new protections under legislation, yet, as working citizens, they were let down by the state. It is past time to rectify that injustice.

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

16:07

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I pay tribute to all Women Against State Pension Inequality campaigners, in particular those in Ayrshire WASPI, whom many MSPs met when the group visited Parliament two weeks ago. Their dedication, courage and tireless advocacy have shone the brightest light possible on the injustice facing women who were born in the 1950s.

The problem was created by successive Labour, coalition and Tory Westminster Governments, which raised the state pension age for women without giving them due notice. As a result, 3.7 million women across the UK who were born between 6 April 1950 and 5 April 1960 were thrown into an impossible situation. That includes more than 336,000 in Scotland and 6,940 in the North Ayrshire and Arran constituency alone. The DWP’s figures make plain the scale of the hardship. In North Ayrshire and Arran, between 2013 and February 2021, the number of women aged 60 and above who were claiming incapacity benefits rose by 315 per cent, while working-age out-of-work benefit claims increased by 472 per cent.

That generation of women had already been a victim of pay discrimination. Without enough notice to enable them to plan financially, WASPI women found themselves having to work years longer than they had anticipated. Many who could not retire or who retired from work anticipating a state pension have endured financial hardship because they were unable to access the pension that they deserved and were promised.

I know from speaking to women who have been affected by the scandal how much it has devastated lives. Pushed into poverty as what savings they had dwindled away, women have had to abandon plans to care for elderly or infirm relatives or take low-paid, insecure or manual work.

The scale of that injustice is matched only by the dignity of the WASPI campaign itself. After five long years, the UK Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman published its final report on “Women’s State Pension age: our findings on injustice and associated issues”. The report vindicated campaigners, finding that thousands of women were impacted by the DWP’s “maladministration” and failure to properly notify them about changes to the state pension. The report stated that women lost

“opportunities to make informed decisions about”

their finances, and that that

“diminished their sense of personal autonomy and financial control.”

Despite that vindication, the ombudsman cannot force the UK Government to pay compensation. Shockingly, the DWP indicated its refusal to comply, which led the ombudsman to take the rare but necessary step of asking Parliament to intervene. However, following a statement on women’s state pension age at Westminster on 25 March, neither the Tories nor Labour is committed to delivering any compensation. Despite at least 12 shadow cabinet members and Keir Starmer previously supporting calls for restitution, not a single one of them repeated that backing following the ombudsman’s report.

Meanwhile, more than 277,000 WASPI women have already passed away without receiving recompense. More WASPI women die on each new day of dither, delay and deferment from the UK Government and His Majesty’s loyal Opposition.

In contrast, the SNP demands that, after years of UK Government inaction, WASPI women must now receive the justice, apology and compensation that they deserve without further delay.

My wife, Patricia Gibson, who is the MP for North Ayrshire and Arran, has vigorously championed the cause of WASPI women, as Douglas Ross pointed out, and she is the only MP to have spoken in every Westminster debate on the subject since her election in 2015. She will lead a back-bench business debate in the House of Commons on 16 May, after which MPs will vote on whether or not they support justice and the delivery of prompt compensation for WASPI women. It is not the warm words that the Tories and Labour offer today that the women seek, but recompense. On that day, we will see where each party truly stands on that important issue.

16:11

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It would not be a contribution from me unless I started with a personal anecdote. I was a child who grew up in the 1970s in Glasgow, and I hit the job market in the late 1980s. At that time, the position of female equality was still moving on from legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. It is hard for women now to imagine a Scotland where they were not allowed to have a bank account or loan without the additional signatory of a father or a husband, but that is how it was.

The idea of feminism and pure, undiluted equality was an absolute driving force for me. It was well discussed that there would have to be

radical changes to allow women and men to be treated equally within the law. Some of the changes would be good and some would be bad, but it was universally accepted that radical change was needed nonetheless.

The plans in the Pensions Act 1995 to increase women’s state pension age from 60 to 65—with a gradual increase over a decade—were pretty much accepted, and I certainly have no recollection of me, my friends or anyone else disagreeing with the need for a more equal state pension process to encompass men and women. It is important to mention that, because we should be mindful that the report from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman is not looking at that decision, as has been mentioned already. Rather, the report was to investigate how the decisions were communicated and explained, and the failings in that regard.

The fact that the ombudsman has taken more than five years to produce the final report reflects the complexities surrounding the matter, and I understand the strong feelings around it. It is right that due care and attention was given when producing the report; it is right that the investigation considers approximately 30 years and goes all the way back to 1995; and it is right that all changes that successive Governments made were thoroughly investigated.

However, as I said, the debate before us is about questioning not the decisions but their communication. The opening sentence from the motion says that

“the Parliament welcomes the report from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman”.

That is the context of our discussion, and I do welcome the report. It is a serious report that requires serious consideration, and I want to place on record my view that we must continue to have dialogue with all those people who have been impacted.

As our amendment states, the UK Government must

“respond in full to the substantial report”

and the

“recommendations contained within it as quickly as possible”.

I also agree with

“the recommendation to pay compensation to those affected”,

and I add my congratulations to the WASPI women and campaigners for their hard work and diligence in getting to this point.

Now that the ombudsman has provided the information, the UK Government has agreed to consider the report’s findings and will bring back

an update to Parliament. That is absolutely right, but it must do so at pace.

Of course, there were numerous findings within the report, and some of its conclusions around access to information, complaint handling and the introduction of transitional arrangements are also important to consider and should form part of a broader reflection by the UK Government.

In conclusion, I applaud the UK Government's commitment to the full and proper consideration of the ombudsman's report and to its continued, full and constructive engagement. I await with interest the Government's findings and I state again that it needs to present them at pace.

16:15

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate, and I thank the First Minister for bringing it to the chamber.

WASPI women worked tirelessly throughout their lives only to find themselves facing a six-year delay to receiving their pension. That left many struggling to make ends meet and facing financial uncertainty at a time when they should have been able to relax and put their feet up.

It is estimated that, in my constituency, more than 4,700 women in East Dunbartonshire and more than 6,000 in West Dunbartonshire have been affected by the changes to the state pension age. I welcome the report from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman on the pensions injustices for women born in the 1950s. The report is clear about the damning failures of the UK Government and the need for it to act now. It needs to deliver on the recommendations to pay compensation in full to those women without any further delay.

The ombudsman's report is clear that some women born in the 1950s were not adequately informed of the impact of the changes. Accurate and timely information was not given to millions of women in the UK, including 356,000 in Scotland. Those women were unfairly penalised for circumstances outwith their control, and they faced the consequences of a policy that was not properly communicated to them. That gave most of them no time to prepare.

I commend my colleague Alan Brown MP for his unwavering commitment on the issue. He noted that the WASPI women are the very same women who were paid less than men, who did not have maternity rights and whose private pensions were smaller than men's pensions, if they had them at all. By raising the pension age without due notice, those women were further penalised.

I met WASPI women, including some of my own constituents, at the parliamentary demonstration a couple of weeks ago. I was proud to stand with them in their fight, and I was glad to get the chance to speak more with them. The recommended pay-outs are paltry sums, and I echo the WASPI women's calls for compensation that reflects decades of mistreatment. Those women are here to stay, and we will keep fighting for them. In the face of injustice, the WASPI women have shown determination and courage. They have spent considerable time advocating for change and raising awareness of their plight.

Many WASPI women groups have done so much amazing work. I am proud to support the West Dunbartonshire WASPI group in my constituency. Its chief co-ordinator, Liz Daly, whom I have met several times, has committed much time to the cause, and for that I am grateful. The group and all WASPI women will be remembered for their resilience, determination and unwavering commitment to justice. I will always be a supporter of the WASPI women, alongside my SNP colleagues here today.

Of course, the fight is not over. The Westminster Government made a real mess of this, and it is time for the women to receive their rightful compensation. The Tory Government must act and right this wrong. If not the Tory Government, Labour must commit to compensating WASPI women. I genuinely ask Labour MSPs here for their commitment. I do not want a fake, manufactured position to be taken in Scotland in this debate. So far, the Labour leader has refused to commit to compensating those women, which is shameful. That is a betrayal of every single WASPI woman. We need cross-party commitments to ensure that justice is delivered for those women. They have waited too long—the time to provide fast and fair compensation is now. Time will tell, but, unfortunately, time is what WASPI women do not have.

16:19

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to contribute to this important debate and to call on the UK Government to take action now to deliver justice and compensation for WASPI women.

WASPI women are calling on the UK Government's Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Mel Stride, to come to the House of Commons to outline his response to the recent report from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and with his Government's proposal to address this injustice. This Parliament should also be calling for that. Frankly, it is astonishing that there has not even been a statement in the House of Commons up until now.

I have been the convener of the WASPI cross-party group since 2021, and it has been a pleasure to work with WASPI campaigners in Scotland, some of whom are in the gallery today and some of whom have made three visits to this Parliament in the past fortnight to lobby politicians. They have consistently campaigned for justice for women who were born in the 1950s and for compensation. Many of the women who are affected are in financial difficulties.

MSPs and MPs from all political parties that are represented in this chamber have been involved in the cross-party group, and it would have been helpful if the Parliament had agreed on a motion today.

A great deal of work was undertaken by Labour prior to the 2021 general election. That work included a manifesto commitment with a detailed package of compensation. Labour, of course, was not elected, and it is for the Conservatives to deliver justice now.

Last month, the then Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman published his long-awaited stage 2 and stage 3 reports on the Department for Work and Pensions maladministration. That report deals with maladministration only. The WASPI campaign was launched in 2021 and we know that, since then, it is estimated that 277,400 WASPI women have died. It is estimated that one 1950s-born woman dies every 13 minutes. One third of WASPI women are in debt, and one in four is living under the poverty line.

In Ayrshire, it is estimated that 26,590 women have been affected, and WASPI campaigners in Ayrshire have done considerable work to quantify the loss to those women and the communities in which they live and to make the case that compensation paid to those women would be spent mainly in local communities and be of benefit to the whole local community.

It is fair to say that many WASPI women are very disappointed that, after a 67-month investigation, the levels of compensation proposed are relatively low. Of course, the ombudsman's report related to maladministration only. The UK Government must come forward quickly with its response to that report and to the proposals. If it does not deal with it, the next UK Government must. We must deliver justice and compensation to those women.

16:22

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I thank the First Minister for bringing this debate to the chamber. I know that many folk heard him speak at Clare Haughey's event with WASPI women the other week, and his passion for the issue is very clear. I had the pleasure of meeting

some Aberdeen WASPI campaigners at Clare Haughey's event: Linda and Helen, who have campaigned very hard for justice. I always enjoy meeting them, but I would like to meet them under different circumstances—after they have been paid the compensation that they rightly deserve.

We must look very closely at the scenarios. These women, many of whom had built their lives around a specific retirement plan, were forced to keep working for years longer than anticipated, in many cases. That was not just an economic hardship; it was a betrayal of trust. It is estimated that almost 356,000 women in Scotland were impacted by the WASPI pensions scandal. Many of those women were already in ill health. Others had taken early retirement and were planning to get by until the age of 60, when they thought that they would receive their state pension.

The UK Government continues to argue that communication happened, but let us be clear that the rug was pulled out from underneath those women's feet. The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman has judged that the UK Government failed to adequately inform thousands of women that the state pension age had changed.

The WASPI women are not asking for handouts. They are asking for recognition of the burden that was placed on them and compensation for the additional years that they worked. The strength and perseverance of the WASPI women are an inspiration. They have raised their voices, and it is time for the UK Government to listen and, more important, to act. We have heard from some speakers today about a need for more dialogue, but now is not the time for more dialogue—there has been too much dialogue. It is time to compensate these women.

All of this is not just about the past, but about the future. We cannot allow similar situations to happen again. Transparency and clear communication about pension changes are absolutely essential. Supporting the WASPI women is also about ensuring that today's working-age adults do not have their pensions whisked away by the swish of a Westminster ministerial pen. Let us be crystal clear that, if the Tory Government—and, maybe, a Labour Government to follow—gets away with this outrage against the WASPI women, it will be coming for the pensions of the rest of us next. Just today, the UK Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, refused to rule out raising the state pension age to 75. What happened to the WASPI women sets the stage for what Westminster may well do next. If it gets away with its outrageous treatment of the WASPI women, it will try it on with everyone else. Let us make sure that the WASPI women get justice. Let us compensate these women now.

16:26

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): It is always good when we get to discuss social security in the Scottish Parliament. The front benches are possibly the most stacked that they have been during a social security debate for a long time. However, I suspect that it is not just the topic but the person who moved the motion that has drawn people here this afternoon. I hope that the First Minister chose the topic as his swan song not just in order to take one last shot at the UK Government, but to bring members together in the chamber so that we can unite. I hope that he has taken the offer in the Conservative amendment seriously and that the Government will accept it so that a voice goes back to London that represents the whole of this Parliament.

The picture that we see before us is that the UK Government is taking time to consider the findings of the report carefully in order to find the best and most sustainable way forward. That has to be correct. We must get this right, because people have waited too long. No one in this chamber and no one in the debate is denying that the situation that we have reached is regrettable. Women planned their lives around the information that they had at the time, and there can be no doubt that this situation has left them worse off. However, that does not negate the fact that the Government has a responsibility to ensure that any and all possible unintended consequences are taken into account before any decision is made. We cannot rush into making decisions. We have seen in Parliament that, when rushed decisions are made and bad legislation is introduced, it does not survive in the time afterwards.

Of course we want the WASPI women to be given a fair deal. Apart from the fact that it would be the right thing to do, they have fought hard and run a successful campaign over the past number of years that deserves a just solution. However, we must ensure that the compensation is affordable and that it allows our social security system across the whole of the United Kingdom to remain sustainable. After all, that must be our consideration when we take any form of social security decision. There has to be an acknowledgement that decisions that are made today will have consequences that reach far into our future.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Balfour: Unfortunately, I do not have time to take an intervention on this occasion.

Unfortunately, that consideration has sometimes been lacking in Scotland since the partial devolution of benefits. We in Scotland are quickly racking up a bill that will become unsustainable,

even by 2026. On the topic of pension compensation, as with social security more broadly, we must balance our generosity with our responsibility.

I welcome the report and look forward to the UK Government's full response when it has fully considered how to move forward in a fair and affordable way. All who are involved deserve nothing less, and I hope that the UK Government will respond in a speedy and appropriate manner.

16:30

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): First, I commend the WASPI women in Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale and across Scotland for their resilience and their determination to see justice for all women who have been affected by the unilateral changes to the state pension. I lodged a motion on the issue in March. I will truncate it, but it said:

"That the Parliament ... recognises the report's findings, which reflect on failings by the DWP 'to provide accurate, adequate and timely information about changes to the State Pension age for women'; acknowledges what it sees as the significant detrimental impact that the DWP's failure to communicate effectively has had on the affected women's ability to plan for their retirement and the financial implications that this has created; believes that women ... have been ... deprived of the pension that they rightfully deserve, and further believes that their fight for justice is taking far too long to be adequately addressed; urges the UK Government to acknowledge the DWP's failings as highlighted in the ... report, issue an immediate apology and deliver fair compensation".

I want to be consensual, but I note that nobody from Labour, the Tories or the Liberal Democrats signed that motion, which I do not think is a hostile one.

I consider it a fact that the provision of the state pension is a contract between the Government and the people, so the unilateral variation of the terms of that contract should not have been implemented. I think that, as times have moved on, we all agree on the equalisation of men's and women's eligibility for the state pension, but the manner in which the age of eligibility for the state pension was increased was at best clumsy and at worst brutally unjust. The latter view is supported by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's report.

That brings me to the yawning gap between the compensation level that is recommended in the report, which is between £1,000 and £2,950, and the claim of the WASPI women for £10,000, which I do not consider to be over the top. Maggie Chapman rightly drew attention to the situation in which a woman who has lost seven years of pension might have seen their pension pot lose £40,000 in value. Even the £2,950 figure is

derisory, as the moving finishing line of the retirement age has left and will leave many in financial difficulties. The recent announcement that a failed asylum seeker who volunteered to be transported to Rwanda was given £3,000 in cash and had other expenses paid puts that in even more context, showing what a slap in the face that recommended compensation level is to the WASPI women.

A survey of 8,000 WASPI women that was carried out in the autumn of 2023 found that 25 per cent had struggled to buy food in the previous six months. What a condemnation.

I say to Beatrice Wishart that, unfortunately, I was born in the 1940s. I had planned my finances on the basis that I would retire at 60, when I became eligible for the state pension—I did not know that I was coming to the Parliament. That was especially timed for paying off my mortgage, having divorced in my late 50s. Divorce is not uncommon in older people these days, and it adds to the financial pressures on women who may have been relying on a partner to support them and on them mutually financing each other.

UK ministers must set up a compensation scheme that provides full and genuine compensation for the women concerned. I ask members to look at the figures that I quoted. So far, neither the UK Conservative Government or the Labour Opposition has come forward with such a scheme. It is time to walk the walk. There should be no more talking about it. We know the position. It has fallen to the SNP people, such as Patricia Gibson, to push for justice. I have to say—perhaps this is not the kindest of notes on which to end my speech—that that may be why no Labour or Tory MSP signed my motion in the first place.

16:34

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I recognise the debate's significance for the WASPI women and their on-going work in the pursuit of justice. They have been tenacious in fighting for their cause.

It is important that the UK Government makes no further delay in responding to the findings of the ombudsman's report. The current Government must respond, and it cannot leave it to the next Government to clear up the mess. The chancellor's comment that there is

"no secret vault of money"

is a far from helpful response. We are well aware of the sorry state of the UK Government's finances, as a result of mismanagement and unfunded spending commitments at the hands of the Conservatives.

Regrettably, there are other examples of the UK Government trying to delay resolution when it comes to having been at fault. The Post Office Horizon cases, the contaminated blood scandal and the Windrush compensation scheme all have parallels. Although the UK Government argues that the information on the changes was provided through some routes, the ombudsman's report is clear in its conclusions that it failed in communication and that that was maladministration. Decision making by the DWP did not give proper weight to targeted information, and research on the need to appropriately target information was ignored and, as a result, the public were not provided with the fullest information possible.

The DWP also failed to promptly write to affected women. It took years longer than it should have, which further restricted many women's ability to adjust their retirement plans. The WASPI campaign argues that many affected women did not find out about the change until as late as 2012. Some had only one year's notice of a six-year delay to their retirement, and many had already left work.

Across the chamber, it is true that some of us are closer to retirement than others, but most of us will have thought about our retirement or are actively planning for it. For many people who are approaching the end of their working life, finding out that, rather than being able to retire in a year's time, they have another six years before that can happen would have a huge impact not only financially but mentally.

Women who had planned for retirement at 60 may have been expected to take on caregiver roles, which they were then not able to do if they had to continue working. Those who were unable to stay in employment had to rely on savings to get by. There was no secret vault of money for them either, but they had to somehow make it work.

Today, if someone wants to check when they will reach state pension age, they can do it almost immediately on the Government's website. That comes with the caveat that the age may increase by up to a year for those who were born between April 1970 and 1978, as well as a general note on the potential for change. However, we know that misleading information on the pension age for women was still on the Government's website until as late as 2016.

Labour has called for an improved notification system that will ensure that future generations are able to properly plan for retirement with timely and targeted information. We must take lessons from this process. It has highlighted the importance of properly considering correspondence and complaints, and particularly of looking at patterns

and potential consequences. There are similarities with the Horizon scandal.

We also need to be aware that, as the DWP's research showed, making policy announcements is not enough. As members of Parliament or Government, we need to be realistic and recognise that, at times, we operate in a bubble, and that most people do not keep on top of policy announcements. The personalisation of news consumption, the fog of disinterest, the sheer breadth of information that is available and the burying of bad news can all add up to a lack of awareness that we need to work to address.

We need to ask ourselves whether the duty of Government to communicate is always sufficient or whether more needs to be done to engage. On the issue of WASPI women, we need to see an immediate response from the UK Government and a resolution to the situation.

16:38

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): The First Minister is absolutely right to say that, if such an injustice had been experienced by men—if they had been treated in the way that the WASPI women have been treated—something would have been done years ago to remedy the injustices that they faced. Those injustices are typical of the structural and systemic inequalities that women face in many—some would say all—aspects of life.

Despite equalities legislation being in place for decades, we still see gender pay gaps and unequal access to services, the labour market, benefits and so much more. We know that inequalities and discrimination do not stop there, so it is right that, perhaps in stark contrast to the past couple of weeks in Scottish politics, there has been a fair degree of consensus across the chamber today. I wish that we could get such agreement on all equalities issues.

I thank those who have contributed to today's debate. It is important that so many different WASPI groups and women have been recognised and celebrated in the chamber. I hope that we see political action at Westminster to match the words that we have heard here.

I turn briefly to the two amendments that are in front of us. I have listened carefully to the contributions from Douglas Ross, Paul O'Kane and their colleagues. Despite our agreement, I am afraid that I cannot support the Conservative amendment, because it would remove the clause that talks specifically about the need for a "higher level of compensation" for WASPI women to properly reflect the financial harm that they have faced.

Douglas Ross: As I explained, we can come back to the wider issue of full compensation in a separate debate, but there is the opportunity today to focus on the PHSO report, which covers the bulk of the Government's motion. It would send a very strong message if we united around that, and we could come back to the other issues at another time.

Maggie Chapman: We have agreement on the PHSO report, but I consider the element that the Conservative amendment would remove—the need for fuller and fairer compensation—to be a vital and intrinsic aspect of the WASPI campaign, and it is one that Scottish Greens support, so we should retain that element.

I agree with the principle and the sentiment of the Labour amendment and with the detail of most of it. Greens have long supported and called for a clear system of notifications about future pension changes. We have always supported the pension triple lock, and I am glad to have the opportunity to put that on the record again today. However, we cannot endorse what is clearly part of the Labour general election campaign machine, so we will abstain on the Labour amendment at decision time.

I thank the Scottish Government for bringing forward the debate, and I thank colleagues across the chamber for their contributions. However, most of all, I thank the WASPI women for their tireless fight for fair and fast compensation—for justice. While we have been here this afternoon, seven WASPI women might have died without that justice. We should act together for them, and the UK Government definitely must act.

16:42

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I join all colleagues in paying tribute to WASPI and its campaigning. Scottish Labour supports the women in their campaign for justice. The report from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman is a major and vital step forward in that campaign and search for justice, and the Labour Party welcomes it. The report demands full consideration by, and robust action from, the UK Government.

It is clear that the women have been dreadfully let down by the changes that the UK Government made to their pension provision. Lives were altered for ever by the Government's failure to communicate the impact of changes to the state pension age. Beatrice Wishart eloquently set out the impact on many women across Scotland. Their plans for retirement—the life that they had hoped for, caring for grandchildren—were snatched from them, and the hopes that they had held for their later years were cruelly dashed.

As many colleagues have highlighted, parliamentarians from all parties have stood alongside the WASPI women, sometimes when they were less listened to and less vindicated than they are now, following the PHSO report. Those parliamentarians listened, demanded action and changed the debate in their own parties.

I met Patricia Gibson MP for the first time on a Finance and Public Administration Committee visit to Westminster just a few weeks ago. She had come directly from the House of Commons chamber, where she had been raising this exact issue, as she has done time and again alongside colleagues from many parties. I pay tribute to her for that work, which was mentioned by Kenneth Gibson earlier.

Far too often in our society, it is women who bear the brunt of injustice, who are forgotten and who are left behind. More broadly, I hope that the WASPI campaign has changed how some such issues are discussed and dealt with. I pay tribute to the tireless campaigners who knew that what had happened was not right and called for justice. The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman report exists only because of that campaign. Labour members know just how much the campaign means to them, and we are pleased to see them finally receiving that recognition.

However, recognition is clearly not enough. The UK Government must urgently respond to the PHSO report, and the Labour Party urges it to get on with that important task as quickly as possible.

Labour is, of course, not in power, so it is for this Government to act now on the recommendations in the PHSO report. WASPI women have been let down for too long and they deserve better than Government intransigence, dither and delay. They must be engaged with and the UK Government must work with them to develop the scheme.

I reject Kevin Stewart's view that the time for dialogue is at an end. This is a scheme that must be developed with the WASPI women, rather than something that is done to them. Our Westminster Labour colleagues are also engaging with the report fully and developing a response.

We in the Scottish Labour Party are desperate for a UK Labour Government and we believe that it can make significant changes in these areas. Any party that has a realistic chance of forming a Government owes it to the public to be as honest as it possibly can be about the economic and fiscal realities that are bequeathed to it—in this case, the economic carnage of the Conservatives' 14 years of austerity and the Truss-induced economic meltdown.

Labour will not make uncosted spending commitments or promise to make unfunded tax cuts, as the Tories do. We must be honest with the

public about the challenges in our public finances and the difficult decisions that would be required if we were to have the privilege of forming the next UK Government and fixing the mess that the Tories leave behind. For that reason, I cannot make uncosted commitments with specific compensation numbers. However, in opening the debate for Labour, Paul O'Kane set out our agreement with the principle of the recommendations in the PHSO report. We want to see it being acted on.

We are also determined that a Labour Government will look after our pensioners. I reject wholesale some SNP members' rhetoric about future pension provision. That is why we are committed to the triple lock and why we have included it in our amendment today. I hope that the SNP Government is able to back it. When we were last in Government, we lifted a million pensioners out of poverty and introduced pension credit. When the Tories broke the triple lock, we campaigned against that and pledged to retain it, should we have the chance to serve in Government.

If the public gives us the chance to serve in Government again, we will grow the economy, get our public services and, crucially, our NHS back on their feet, and we will restore the public finances to a sustainable footing.

Christine Grahame: Will the member give way?

Michael Marra: I am just closing, I am afraid.

That is the kind of sensible and grown-up Government that people across our country, including pensioners, are crying out for. I close by paying tribute again to the WASPI women and I look forward to justice being delivered.

16:47

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): The Parliament was not scheduled to hold a debate on WASPI women today; the original debate for this afternoon was on positive masculinity. I was looking forward to talking about men's sheds and how they are helping men to open up about their mental health and creating generations of role models who will help and support younger men so that they can become role models in their family and among their friends, especially when it comes to relationships with women. Considering that the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee is looking at suicide prevention, and that suicide is the biggest killer among men under the age of 35, I hope that the debate can be rescheduled. I am pleased that Paul O'Kane also called for that debate to take place at another point.

I turn to the crux of today's debate. My party leader, Douglas Ross, set out the Scottish Conservatives' position on the WASPI campaign. I echo his remarks and those of others in congratulating the women who have been relentless in their efforts to obtain compensation for the changes to their state pension. That view has been echoed by many members during their contributions today.

Since being elected in 2021, I have often stood up in the chamber and fought for women's issues. I recognise how painful the campaign has been and I do not think that any Government would ever intentionally try to cause hurt and anger. However, I see the reason for creating more parity and equality for men and women who are in receipt of the state pension.

The WASPI women recognise that it was never about the decisions, but about how the decisions were carried out. That is why it is right for the UK Government to consider carefully the ombudsman's findings before updating MPs at Westminster.

Some MSPs have reflected this afternoon on the WASPI campaign and the journeys of particular women. We have heard that women have been negatively impacted financially and emotionally by decisions that have been taken. The First Minister rightly mentioned that all political party leaders have pledged their support for the WASPI campaign.

Colleagues have given a long list of women who have never given up, who have kept going and who have made sure that their voices have been heard. It is right to pay tribute to Sheila, Linda, Lorraine and every woman who has written a letter, attended an elected member's surgery or given evidence about how they have been affected by the changes in state pension age.

Some of our MP colleagues have also been mentioned—Carolyn Harris, Tim Loughton and Peter Aldous have all taken the issue to Westminster to fight on behalf of women.

This afternoon, MSPs have referred to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's report. It is fair to say that the outcome of that report has been the subject of a lot of today's speeches. The process has taken five long years, and the issue has been raised consistently by Roz McCall and others.

Even though the report concluded that timely and accurate information was available about changes to the number of qualifying years that were needed in order to receive a full state pension, it recognised that there have been significant issues. Many women did not understand the situation as regards their own personal circumstances and how the new state

pension would impact on them, and the DWP did not adequately use feedback and research to improve its service and performance. Jeremy Balfour and others referred to unintended consequences.

The report also concluded that the maladministration of the DWP's complaints handling had caused unnecessary distress and anxiety, and that women had lost the opportunity to make informed decisions about personal autonomy and financial control. Most importantly, the report recommended that those who have suffered injustice should be compensated financially. I do not think that anybody who has spoken in the debate has argued otherwise.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives' amendment

"calls on the UK Government to respond in full to the substantial report ... and recommendations contained within it as quickly as possible, including the recommendation to pay compensation".

Douglas Ross gave a passionate speech that aimed to unite Parliament; our amendment is also one of consensus. Earlier, MSPs were asked to rise to the challenge—

Christine Grahame: I think that the issue with your amendment is that you seem content—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, Ms Grahame.

Christine Grahame: —that the maximum level of compensation is £2,950. Surely the member cannot think that that is a reasonable offer.

Meghan Gallacher: As Douglas Ross explained in his intervention on Maggie Chapman, our amendment is about getting consensus in Parliament today. We could certainly return to such issues. I think that our request is reasonable. We are seeking to unite Parliament, as was made clear earlier, and I hope that we can all rise to that challenge today, especially now that we have different circumstances and we are working in Parliament with a minority Government.

This debate is the first test, and it gives us the best opportunity to unite behind the WASPI women. It should not be about party lines; politicians of every party have raised the issues of the WASPI campaign. We can come back to the issue of compensation at a later date. We can have another debate on WASPI women and the WASPI campaign. It is a really important issue, so there would be no issue with our coming back and having discussions again.

I will reflect on Beatrice Wishart's speech, to which I really enjoyed listening. She spoke about the rise of feminism in this country and how some of the women who were behind the rise of feminism have been impacted. They fought for

equality and equal rights. By standing up for rights through really difficult times, they tried to make the lives of future generations better. They are the stalwarts who have passed the baton on to younger women so that they can continue that fight to achieve equality.

I echo Douglas Ross's calls and ask the Government to support our amendment. We are trying to reach beyond the political divide to send a unified message to the UK Government that the PHSO's recommendations be implemented in full and that the women who have been impacted receive the compensation that they deserve.

16:54

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): It is a privilege to close this very important debate on behalf of the Scottish Government. It is also a privilege to do so alongside my friend and colleague the First Minister. His support for the WASPI women is unquestionable and unwavering, as is his support for equality and his fight against injustice. I look forward to campaigning side by side with him once again in the future, just as we did long before we got involved in elected politics together.

I move to this very important issue. The Scottish Government has been consistent in our calls for the UK Government to immediately right the wrongs that the WASPI women suffered. With the publication of the PHSO report, the UK Government simply cannot waste any more time. Compensation must be delivered now and in full.

Along with the First Minister, I had the privilege of meeting some of the WASPI campaigners here in Parliament once again today, to hear directly from them, once again, about the need, which I fully agree on, for urgent action from the UK Government. As the First Minister said to them and repeated in the chamber, this is about justice and compensation. I think and hope that we can unite on that.

The PHSO report clearly identifies the need for compensation due to "maladministration" through the DWP's failures to "act promptly" in writing to the women who were impacted by the changes in the state pension age—incidentally, the DWP also called on Governments to prioritise that action. It is vital that the UK Government and the DWP take responsibility for those failings but also that they deliver that full compensation package at the earliest possible time.

I call on the UK Government to listen to the WASPI women's calls for comprehensive compensation that takes into account the financial hardship that they suffered coupled with the fact that the UK Government has one of the worst gender pension gaps in the Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development. It is time to stop letting women down.

In the PHSO report, there is—quite rightly—criticism of the "maladministration" in the communication of the equalisation of state pension age for men and women. As the First Minister noted in his remarks, the Government fully supports Alan Brown MP's bill, which carries full cross-party support and calls on the UK Government to publish a compensation framework for WASPI women, which is set at £3,000 to £10,000 or more—the WASPI campaigners, too, feel that that outcome would be fairer, given the wider financial hardship that the devastating policy has had—and Kenny Gibson has, quite rightly, highlighted Patricia Gibson's back-bench business debate. Those are two opportunities for Tories and Labour to support WASPI women—or not—and they will be judged on their action or inaction on the case.

The PHSO has taken the highly unusual step of urging the UK Parliament to intervene to ensure that the UK Government acts on the recommendations in the report. I hope that the debate will add to those calls. Not only has the UK Government failed to clearly commit to addressing the report seriously or urgently; it is disappointing to note that there have been no calls from other UK Parliament parties for the UK Government to act on the findings of the report, with the exception of the SNP.

Douglas Ross: The cabinet secretary is summing up the debate in the spirit in which it has been held, that is, one of fairly consensual contributions. The amendment that I have lodged states that the UK Government should

"respond in full"

to the PHSO report,

"including the recommendation to pay compensation",

and do so as a matter of urgency. The language is almost identical to that of the Scottish Government's motion. Could the Government, even at this late stage in the debate, consider supporting my amendment, so that the message that goes to the UK Government is one of unanimity from the Scottish Parliament? We would then come back at a later time—scheduled by the Government and supported by us—to have a full debate on the entire WASPI compensation.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I was going to come to the Tory amendment later, but let me do so now. The Government cannot support it, and I will be clear about why. The Scottish Conservative amendment takes out:

"the UK Government must now urgently deliver on the ombudsman's recommendations to pay compensation in full to those women without delay".

It then also takes out the WASPI women's

"calls for a higher level of compensation."

With the greatest respect, I listened carefully to what Douglas Ross said today, but we cannot just go on the words in the chamber. Let us look at the devil in the detail of the Conservative amendment, which, I am afraid, means that it is letting WASPI women down again. We simply will not do that today.

This is a minority Parliament, which brings new and greater responsibility for those of us in the Government and for members across the chamber. I am very aware as a Scottish Government minister of my responsibilities in a minority Government. I know that whoever takes office as First Minister in the coming weeks will be, too. I take that very seriously, but my ask today is for members to unite on the WASPI women campaign calls. That is what we in the Scottish Government are trying to do.

Minority government does not just shine a light on the Scottish Parliament; it shines a light on how we all act within it. It shines a light on what we will vote on at decision time. This is the first substantive vote since we began to serve as a minority Government, and we all—every one of us—have a choice. Representatives of the WASPI women are in the gallery today.

I have dealt with the Tory amendment; now let me come to Labour. I ask Labour members what they will do at decision time. Many of the WASPI women will have met them over the years. They will have marched with the WASPI women and applauded them, but the difficulty with the Labour amendment is that there are now caveats on that compensation. There were no caveats when they marched together, and there were no caveats when they applauded the WASPI women. There is a real, genuine possibility not to delay, as the Conservatives have done, or to put caveats on, as the Labour Party has done, but to come together to serve the WASPI women, as I think they want us to do.

Paul O'Kane: I find it bewildering that the Government has decided not to back a reasonable amendment from the Labour Party that seeks to create a consensus and support the voice of WASPI women in the preparation of that compensation scheme. Crucially, the amendment also seeks to protect the triple lock. I find it very strange indeed.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I greatly respect Paul O'Kane, so I am sure that he did not mean to suggest that, if we back the WASPI women, we cannot back the triple lock. We can do both things, but I do not think that that is what he meant, and it is important to say that.

The reason why there is a difficulty with the Labour amendment is that, as Maggie Chapman pointed out, given the figures that we have, seven WASPI women may have died as we have talked about this today. They do not have time for us to have another debate or to think about the level of compensation. Their asks have been clear for years now. We have the opportunity to unite. We kept the motion simple—it is about what the WASPI women have asked for.

This is what I urge Parliament to do today. Do not listen to me—do not even listen to the First Minister. Listen to the WASPI women in the gallery and those they represent.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): That concludes the debate on Women Against State Pension Inequality.

Business Motions

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-13042, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 7 May 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Welfare of Dogs (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 8 May 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist 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 9 May 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Social Justice

followed by Ministerial Statement: 2024-25 Finance Update Following UK Government Spring Budget

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Appointments of the Chair and Commissioners of the Poverty and Inequality Commission

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 14 May 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 15 May 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

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 16 May 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Education and Skills

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Aggregates Tax and Devolved Taxes Administration (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Aggregates Tax and Devolved Taxes Administration (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 6 May 2024, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motions S6M-13043 and S6M-13044, on stage 2 timetables for bills. I ask any member who wishes to speak to the motions to press their request-to-speak button. I call George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motions.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 24 May 2024.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 24 May 2024.—[George Adam]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-13045, on parliamentary recess dates. I call George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following parliamentary recess dates under Rule 2.3.1: 8 to 16 February 2025 (inclusive), 5 to 20 April 2025 (inclusive), 28 June to 31 August 2025 (inclusive), 11 to 26 October 2025 (inclusive), 20 December 2025 to 4 January 2026 (inclusive).— [George Adam]

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

Decision Time

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-13041.2, in the name of Douglas Ross, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13041, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on Women Against State Pension Inequality, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

Given that members have already voted today, I would be grateful if they refreshed their screens before we move to the vote.

We move to the vote on amendment S6M-13041.2, in the name of Douglas Ross, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13041, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on Women Against State Pension Inequality. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My gadget would not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Grahame. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

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

White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

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

Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) Proxy vote
 cast by Richard Leonard
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 31, Against 74, Abstentions 21.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-13041.1, in the name of Paul O'Kane, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13041, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on Women Against State Pension Inequality, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) Proxy vote

cast by Richard Leonard
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)

McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD) Proxy vote cast by Willie Rennie
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 21, Against 95, Abstentions 11.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-13041, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on Women Against State Pension Inequality, 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, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)

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

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 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)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-13041, in the name of Humza Yousaf, is: For 75, Against 0, Abstentions 52.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the report from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman into the pension injustices on women born in the 1950s; agrees that the UK Government must now urgently deliver on the ombudsman's recommendations to pay compensation in full to those women without delay; echoes the Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) campaign's calls for a higher level of compensation to properly reflect the financial harm; notes the report's conclusions on the UK Government's failings of communication and

maladministration; congratulates the WASPI women on this milestone in their campaign, and highlights cross-party commitments to delivering justice for them all.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-13045, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on parliamentary recess dates, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees the following parliamentary recess dates under Rule 2.3.1: 8 to 16 February 2025 (inclusive), 5 to 20 April 2025 (inclusive), 28 June to 31 August 2025 (inclusive), 11 to 26 October 2025 (inclusive), 20 December 2025 to 4 January 2026 (inclusive).

The Presiding Officer: That concludes—

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek clarification on an email circulated from the chief executive's office to all members of the Scottish Parliament in relation to the protest camp that is currently taking place outside the Parliament building.

I understand entirely that, if an MSP or a member of staff were to take part in camping outside the building, we or they would, indeed, have breached the policy. However, I have been contacted by a number of staff and by other MSPs because there is some ambiguity about the message that has been sent to us, and some have been left under the impression that any engagement at all with those taking part in the protest, such as simply speaking to them on the way in or out of this building, would also be in breach of that policy. Can the Presiding Officer offer reassurance to MSPs and staff that simply by speaking to those who are protesting outside we would not have breached the Parliament's protest policy?

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Greer. As you will be aware, that is not a question about whether proper procedures are or have been followed in the chamber.

The code of conduct for MSPs states that

"Members must abide by the policies that are adopted by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body".

One of those policies, the protest policy, includes the restriction that protesters should not camp

"at any time, including overnight, for protest or any other reason".

It has been made clear to the current protesters that, although we support the right to protest at Holyrood, they do not have permission to camp on the Parliament's grounds and they are not in compliance with the corporate body's protest policy. It is expected that members would withdraw from any protest that breaches the terms and conditions that are set out in the Parliament's policy.

That concludes decision time.

International Workers Memorial Day 2024

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-12695, in the name of Maggie Chapman, on celebrating workers and trade unions on May day. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises 1 May 2024 as International Workers' Memorial Day, also known as May Day, which is an annual observance that commemorates what it sees as the historic struggles of and gains made by workers and the trade union movement; further recognises 4 May as International Firefighters' Day, which is an annual observance that honours the service and sacrifices made by firefighters worldwide; acknowledges what it considers to be the vital role that workers and trade unions play in Scotland's economy and communities, from caring for and educating people, to building infrastructure and keeping people safe; notes the belief that the principles of fair work, including that of effective voice and trade union recognition, should be central to all workplaces; recognises the campaigning work done by trade unions to achieve what it considers to be positive policy changes across the Scottish economy, especially those related to taxation, fair pay, health and safety, transport and energy; understands that the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and other trade unions will mark May Day with events in Aberdeen and Dundee in the north east and many other places across Scotland; notes the encouragement for all interested to attend an event in their area, and further notes the calls to support the trade union movement both now and in the future.

17:15

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Today is May day—a day for both workers and Beltane. I sometimes wonder whether, deep in the mists of time, those two days were linked. Beltane and other May day traditions marking the beginning of summer often involved rituals in which an ordinary person was chosen to be a lord of misrule: someone to take the place of the lord or master and govern in their place for that day or a certain period.

Beltane traditions were an important element of pre-modern cultures, when power could not be wielded in a universal way as the modern state seeks to do. Almost no pre-modern culture revered those in power and left them there all the time. Often, those in power were figures of fun—not in the way that a leader who lasts less long than a lettuce is a figure of fun, but structurally.

May day has its origins as we know it today, as workers day, in the Haymarket massacre in Chicago. The massacre happened during a campaign for an eight-hour working day, which has its modern equivalent in the current campaign for a four-day working week. Just as the wealthy

who lived off the work that was done by others argued that 19th century workers should be forced to work 12 to 16-hour days, so the wealthy today, who live off the work that is done by others, suggest that a four-day week would be catastrophic. Of course, we know that neither is true. One hundred years ago, fair working hours were good for everyone; now, fair working weeks are, similarly, good for everyone.

However, I think that the roots of May day go back beyond the 1886 campaign for an eight-hour day. So, what is the link between May day and Beltane? The action for the campaign for an eight-hour day began with a strike of industrial workers across the United States. They chose 1 May as the start date for their strike, and I think that we can assume that it was for a good reason.

We are talking about an era in which there is very little written evidence of what happened with working-class people—much less evidence of where they exercised their power. Workers did not get to shape the narrative of the history that we assume as fact. What I think might have happened was that many of the lords of misrule who were chosen to govern for a day turned out to be better rulers than the authorities of the day. They turned the world upside down. They enjoyed more popularity and they reversed unfair decisions. They highlighted the often self-interested nature of power. I think that it is safe to assume that that probably ended pretty badly for them when the normal order of things resumed.

We see parallels with that today, with structures of power and elites with vested interests in the status quo using their power and influence to keep progressive change from rising. That is why we see public bodies still failing to pay the living wage to workers, including—to my dismay—companies that are owned by the Scottish Government. It is why we see too many workers, including those who are contracted to provide public services, still not receiving the real living wage.

We see a shocking situation in which maternity leave is unequal across sectors, including—shamefully—in the public sector. We have on-going fair pay disputes across Moray, Fife, Dundee, West Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire and Falkirk councils. There continue to be job evaluation issues in Glasgow, and discriminatory practices are used by contractors that deliver council services.

Very directly, we have the continued refusal by the United Kingdom Government and Opposition to devolve employment law. If we had those powers, we might be able to go some way towards creating a good example.

As we face the problems of the future, we need to find ways to work together to deliver a better

world. Essential to that work must be our engagement with workers and their trade unions. Many of us in the chamber are long-time trade unionists—I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am a member of Unite the union.

Over the past couple of weeks, there has been a festival of trade unionism in Dundee. The Speak Oot festival of events, although it might not quite involve the appointment of a lord of misrule, has seen workers, activists, community organisers, campaigners and politicians from across the city and beyond, and from across many political parties, come together to debate, learn, share, celebrate and show solidarity with one another. I really enjoyed attending several events, and I pay tribute to the organising group for such a great festival.

Over the past couple of years, I have been privileged to work closely with the Fire Brigades Union and its DECON campaign. It is only right that some of the bravest of public servants are treated properly and are given the support, facilities and training that they need to keep themselves safe and to clean carcinogenic toxins off their bodies, clothes and equipment while they work to save our lives and our communities. I put on record again my support for the women in the FBU who are fighting for 52—for improved maternity pay by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service—to bring our service in line with several others across the rest of the United Kingdom. I look forward to marking, with the FBU and others, international firefighters day this Saturday.

As we heard yesterday in Bill Kidd's members' business debate on recognising the 50th anniversary of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, trade unions have played a pivotal role in improving the conditions in which their members work. I know that we will hear about some specific campaigns during this debate, but I highlight one last one: Unite the union's fair hospitality charter, with its "Get ME home safely" campaign. Employers have a responsibility to ensure that their workers—those who are responsible for the functioning and success of an employer's service or business—are safe as they make their way home after work.

I am proud of the record of Scottish Greens in delivering positive change for workers across Scotland through our work with the Scottish Government over the past couple of years, particularly on fair work. However, we have so much more to do. We need to challenge the wealthy and elites to deliver a fair and just world. We need to turn the world upside down.

I end with a short extract from the folk song "The World Turned Upside Down":

"You poor take courage
 You rich take care
 This earth was made a common treasury
 For everyone to share
 All things in common
 All people one
 We come in peace".

17:22

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I thank our colleague Maggie Chapman for bringing this important debate to the chamber. It is a credit to our colleague and to the Parliament that, in the week when we remember the contribution of workers and the trade union movement in the fight for better working conditions, respect and dignity, we are having concurrent members' business debates on the importance of those individuals and groups to the historical establishment of workers' rights and the continuing struggle not only to maintain them but to better them for the future. The old adage, "Mourn for the dead, but fight for the living", unfortunately, continues to be relevant today.

In last night's debate, we touched on many issues that are also relevant to this debate, and we paid tribute to those who furthered these rights. That includes the work that the FBU has done in modernising and responding to new threats through its DECON campaign, and the Breathe Safe campaign, supported by the GMB, to assist its welding members to have a longer and healthier later life.

New threats to workers' health and to their right to fair work are ever constant. It is fitting that this year's workers memorial day was on the theme of the climate crisis and workers' health. As the climate crisis worsens, changing weather patterns have notable effects on the world of work, affecting, in particular, workers' welfare, safety and health. Examples of occupational risks that have been exacerbated by climate change include heat stress, ultraviolet radiation, air pollution, major industrial accidents, extreme weather events and increased exposure to particulates and chemicals. Those and other examples highlight how workers' rights and our safety laws—as I said yesterday—need to evolve to keep pace with change.

Trade union membership currently exceeds 644,000 in Scotland, and those members represent a hugely important collective force for ensuring positive change, now and in the future. They are welcomed by the great majority of us as a positive influence in Scottish society. Representing more than 555,000 of those workers, the Scottish Trades Union Congress stands out as a positive, forward-thinking champion for workers' rights, nationally and internationally. I put on record my thanks to all

those involved in ensuring that the voice of Scotland's workers is heard.

The STUC recently called for employment law to be devolved, and it has been instrumental in successfully moving a motion at the Trades Union Congress general council, calling

"for the TUC General Council to campaign for the devolution of employment law to Scotland in addition to repealing all Tory anti-trade union laws, including the Strikes Bill and the Trade Union Act (2016)."

That position is supported by the Scottish Government and Scottish Labour, whose support we welcome. Yesterday, I echoed the calls for health and safety law to be devolved, as did the Minister for Energy, Just Transition and Fair Work. I hoped that that was an issue that all parliamentarians could get behind. I still do, and I believe that we are okay there.

17:26

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow Bill Kidd. I join him in paying tribute to those who serve in our Fire and Rescue Service as we approach international firefighters day, and I humbly acknowledge their service and sacrifice.

My dad was a butcher and worked for the co-op in Forfar, my mother was a shop worker, and my grandparents were factory workers and tenant farmers, so I know about the immense good that can be achieved by the trade union movement. I do not even need my old friend Richard Leonard to drum into me the importance of trade unions and the need to protect workers; I am there already. I therefore rise in this debate to praise trade unionism.

There is a lot to be said in praise of the pragmatic, collaborative and constructive leadership of many trade unions today, but one of the features of life in this country when I was a boy was negative and belligerent trade unionism, with union leaders driven by an anti-capitalist ideology. They saw themselves as being in the business of overthrowing the system, thought of themselves as being more politically powerful than the elected Governments of the day and boasted of holding the Government hostage to their demands. Their own political ends were often to the detriment of the best interests of their members.

The nadir of that kind of militant trade unionism was the travesty of the Ford manufacturing investment in Dundee in 1988, when 1,000 jobs would have been secured by major investment, but the GMB would not agree to a single union agreement, so the whole investment was lost.

In recent decades, particularly after the necessary trade union reforms of the 1980s and

1990s, the culture of trade unionism and its leadership have had to adapt and change. In 1982, we saw the end of the compulsory closed shop. In 1984, there was the need for a ballot before industrial action. In 1990, there was the need for a postal secure independent ballot. In 1992, there was the opt-in to the political levy, rather than the opt-out. As has already been mentioned, in 2016, there was the requirement for minimum turnouts to validate a strike ballot.

Those measures—the Trade Union Act 2016 standing aside—have been supported by successive Governments, and they have proved to be so popular with the public that no Labour Government has ever attempted to repeal them. As a result, trade unions have become a key component of the phenomenal job-creating machine that is the modern British economy.

When I listen to Angela Rayner promising to repeal trade union laws, I worry that we could go back to the days of negative trade unionism. Today's economy is characterised by technological advancements, global competition and a shift towards service-based industries. The trade unions have recognised, to their credit, that the rigid union structures of the 1960s and 1970s can hinder the interests of their members, as well as stymie growth and job creation.

The fact is that survey after survey has shown that, when this country has voted for Conservative Governments, so have members of trade unions. Trade unions will continue to evolve in the era of automation, robotics, machine learning and artificial intelligence. They will adapt to the realities of the modern economy, such as the need to embrace constant change and reform, recognising that it is on the basis of co-operation, innovation and reform that we will see economic growth, increasing productivity, rising standards of living and more equality of opportunity for all.

17:30

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank Maggie Chapman for bringing forward this special debate, and I remind members of my voluntary register of trade union interests.

Freedom of association is a basic human right. Trade unions are not just about wages; they do have a political character. May day in Chicago, 1886, and the Haymarket Square massacre is a reminder that it was not higher wages; it was shorter hours—it was the fight for the eight-hour day that lies at the very root of the modern trade union movement. Go and look at the slogans on the old trade union banners:

“Shorter hours and longer life”,

or

“Out of darkness into light”,

or

“The cause of labour is the hope of the world”.

So I come here tonight to reaffirm my faith and my belief in the value of trade unionism as a force for good in society. It is where I had my real education, it is where I had many of my values shaped, it is where I worked with some of the finest women and men I have ever met: workplace shop stewards, the very lifeblood of the trade union movement. I have much to be thankful for. It is that experience which led me to the conclusion that trade unions are at their best when they do not simply strive to get the best deal for their members from the current economic and social system, but when they strive to fundamentally change the current economic and social system.

It was Sydney Hill of the National Union of Public Employees—NUPE—who once famously said that trade unions are not fruit machines in which you put in money in the hope of winning a jackpot. Unions should be organs of social and economic change to end alienation, to end exploitation, because as long as they exist, conflict is inevitable. So, when workers vote to take industrial action, in my book, you do not have a debate about whether to support them or not; you get right in behind them one hundred per cent. What is surprising to me is not that we have had strikes in the last year on the railway, in our colleges, at Scottish Water and across both the public and private sectors; it is that we have not had more of them and that they are not more prevalent.

Of course, most trade unions have horizons way beyond collective bargaining alone—radical aims which are ethical, legal, political and social: a reconstruction of the existing social order; economic reconstruction, so that we have an economy working for the needs of the people instead of people simply working for the needs of the economy; the establishment of industrial democracy and of workers' control; the humanisation of work; and the elimination of gross inequalities, not just in the standard of living but in the quality of life, and so, a redistribution of not just wealth but power.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Richard Leonard: I am just finishing up.

Finally, at the weekend, we will mark May day by taking to the streets. In so doing, we will be demonstrating that we are part of a worldwide movement and that we know that the same people exploiting workers in the sweatshops of the far east and taking away their rights on the construction sites of the Gulf are exploiting workers and are taking away their rights right

across the world, so that we know that we must look beyond nationalism, that we must look beyond wages, that we must look beyond the industrial struggle alone and understand that there is a world to win. It is a world that we have it in our own hands to create, if only we have the will, if only we have the courage, if only we have the determination to stand firm and see it through.

17:35

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I am pleased to speak in this debate, which was secured by my colleague Maggie Chapman, recognising international workers memorial day and international firefighters day.

Every May day, we celebrate and honour the immense contributions that workers and trade unions have made to building a fairer, more just Scotland. They have been at the forefront of securing vital rights and protections, from workplace safety standards to fairer wages to collective bargaining. As legislators, it is our duty to make all work safer and healthier. We remember the dead and fight for the living to ensure that no one leaves for work and does not come home.

Trade unions give workers a powerful voice and a platform to advocate for their rights and interests. That is especially critical in sectors such as social care, where predominantly female and underpaid workforces have long battled for better pay and conditions through their unions. That is why, last year, while in Government, the Scottish Greens raised the wages of adult social care and childcare staff to at least £12 an hour across the social care sector. That is especially vital in rural Scotland, where more care workers are needed to support our ageing and dispersed population.

In many rural areas, such as those that I represent, the public sector is the largest employer, with trade unions representing teachers, council workers, national health service staff and more. Cuts to public services are cuts to rural economies and communities. That is why I am proud that, during this year's budget negotiations, the Scottish Greens secured an additional £1.5 billion for public services and for the workers who deliver them. The extra funds that are being raised through progressive tax reforms are supporting fair pay rises. We fought tirelessly for that investment because we value our public sector workers, but we can and must do more.

Last summer, I spoke with firefighters at the Parliament and in my region to discuss their days spent battling wildfires—a situation that Highland residents are told they are currently at severe risk of facing again. Increasingly, the work of our firefighters involves tackling flooding and wildfires,

which are exacerbated by extreme weather. Yesterday, Deputy Chief Officer Stuart Stevens said:

“we expect climate change to intensify and present further challenges that we must be prepared to meet.”

Our depleted natural environment and extraction of its resources, as well as the climate crisis, are adding to the dangers that they face. We must redouble our efforts to address global heating and consider how we manage our land to increase its resilience and adaptation to our changing climate.

Progressive tax reforms, which the Scottish Greens pushed for, mean more money for our vital services and for the valued workers who staff them. From caring for our loved ones to teaching our young people to keeping our communities safe, our public sector workers are the backbone of society. On this May day, let us reaffirm our unwavering support for their rights, their working conditions and their unions.

17:38

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I, too, thank Maggie Chapman for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I agree with Bill Kidd: what is not to like about another evening in which we get the opportunity to talk about the work, the benefit and the importance of the trade union movement? I have attended May day events since I was about 15 years old, and I now march with my children to mark this important Labour day and to help them to understand why we need that solidarity in our communities to this very day.

I note my entry in the register of members' interests as a lifelong member of the trade union movement, a Unite member and convener of the Communication Workers Union parliamentary group.

I agree whole-heartedly with Maggie Chapman's motion. Observing these days to remember workers is important, as is raising their voices. It is our duty as MSPs, particularly Labour MSPs, to bring these matters to Parliament and to speak about them in the chamber. Those of us who were born into the trade union movement have a responsibility to do so.

I thank Maggie Chapman for her work with the Fire Brigades Union; I know that she has worked really hard to support all manner of workers' rights in the firefighting services. I know that, in particular, she has championed the DECON campaign and continues to do so, which is much appreciated across the trade union movement.

As we have heard, trade unions started a number of years ago with the industrialisation of the late 18th and 19th centuries, which meant that thousands of workers needed to move to towns

and cities to live and work in poverty. The success of British industry in the 100 years from 1780 was built on the exploitation of hundreds of thousands of workers, who—as we have heard—worked long days for miserable wages and lived in a very poor standard of accommodation. Workers realised that they could fight ruthless employers and inhumane working conditions only by coming together, and so trade unions were born.

Trade unions were fiercely opposed by owners of industry. When I was researching my speech, I thought to myself, “I fear that perhaps elements of Government and big business today continue to fear the trade unions and oppose them, so we must continue the struggle that started hundreds of years ago.”

The most celebrated pioneers of British trade unionism—perhaps the first who organised—are the Tolpuddle martyrs: six Dorset farm labourers, who were, as members will know, eventually deported for joining or creating a trade union. I have read a lot about them, and I would, at some point, like to attend the festival that celebrates those brave workers. They realised that coming together and working in solidarity would yield results.

Although many of us in the trade union movement would acknowledge that we do not frequently get results, many members have spoken tonight about coming together and getting results. I am running out of time, but I just mention this: if people enjoy May day as a celebration of trade union activism, they must attend the Durham miners gala. In my view, it is one of the finest dates in the trade union calendar—a time to be proud of our movement and stand next to so many trade unionists and activists who work relentlessly to ensure that we fight for what is right.

Since 1871, Durham miners gala has celebrated trade union collectivism, community spirit and the international solidarity that so many members have spoken about. It gets bigger and better every year, so if anyone gets the chance, they should go.

I finish with a quote from the gala:

“The past we inherit, the future we build.”

Solidarity with the workers!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Richard Lochhead to wind up the debate.

17:42

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): I thank Maggie Chapman for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I thank all the members who have

taken part for their thoughtful and powerful contributions.

I, too, am proud to join others in highlighting the significance of international workers memorial day—May day, as we call it, or labour day, as they call it in many countries around the world—to commemorate the historic struggles and achievements of workers in the trade union movement globally. As we have heard, it was first recognised in the late 1800s, and May day was initially intended as a one-off protest for the right of workers to an eight-hour day.

I gently point out to Stephen Kerr, in response to his comments, that many countries did not have universal suffrage back then. He talked about militancy against elected Governments but, as there was no universal suffrage in many countries, people could not elect or deselect them. If we go back in time, we also find that factory bosses and landowners comprised many of the politicians, which is why solidarity was required.

Stephen Kerr: I clarify that I was referring to the experience of this country, not other countries. I understand that circumstances in other countries in the 70s and 80s were what they were, but I was describing the reality in this country in the 1970s in particular.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, minister.

Richard Lochhead: Even in this country, of course, in the 1800s, there was not universal suffrage. I put that on the record.

The brave and tragic acts of protest that I and others have referred to, alongside rising trade unionism, led to a major movement within labour and workers' rights. Others have referred to the Haymarket massacre in Chicago. Although May day had a huge impact on the trade union movement, it also exposed the existence of the horrific working conditions to which many members have referred.

This commemoration gives us an opportunity, in this country and internationally, to recognise and commemorate those who, unfortunately, left for work and did not come home. In the debate held in the Parliament on Mick McGahey and his legacy, I told the story from my family, of my great-great-grandmother who lost her father, husband and son in separate mining accidents—which is quite something when we think about it. That was not uncommon, but it shows why we should be commemorating workers' rights, progress, the trade union movement, health and safety and the other issues that members have mentioned.

It is right that, alongside May day, we recognise international firefighters day on 4 May. The Scottish Government of course recognises the

bravery and dedication that firefighters show on a daily basis to keep our communities safe. As we all know, over history, Scotland has experienced tragic events that meant that firefighters paid the ultimate price to save others. International firefighters day gives us a chance to pause and reflect on firefighters who have lost their lives and on the impact on their family, friends and colleagues.

Fighting fires and carrying out rescues is an inherently risky undertaking but, in working with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and its predecessor services, the Fire Brigades Union, which the motion refers to, has been central in developing safe systems of work to reduce that risk. Most recently, the FBU has been at the forefront of campaigning to reduce the risk of contaminants being harmful to firefighter health. I am pleased that our Fire and Rescue Service here in Scotland is taking that very seriously and is adapting its systems of work, as well as using the £10 million of capital funding that was allocated this year to invest in fleets, equipment and buildings to address that issue.

We absolutely recognise the impact that May day has had on the trade union movement and workers' rights. The motion refers specifically to the FBU, as is right in the context of international firefighters day. In the broader context of May day, we should pay tribute to the vital work that the wider trade union movement has played in improving workers' safety. It is also important to recognise the positive impact that employer and trade union partnerships have in creating more progressive, more productive, safer and more engaged worker environments. That is one area where I agree with a point made by Stephen Kerr, and by others.

We know that, in this country, fair work brings increased security, better physical health and greater psychological wellbeing for workers. We know that it provides a more engaged, committed and adaptable workforce. Fair work—our policy in Scotland—is good for the economy; it drives productivity, it releases untapped potential and it inspires innovation. We know that effective voices are a critical dimension of fair work at a collective level and that trade unions can help workers to attain better terms and conditions. That is why we continue to promote trade union recognition and collective bargaining to achieve improved conditions and to enhance effective voices. That is an important step in our overall policy of Scotland being a fair work nation in 2025.

Stephen Kerr: Given that, why does the Scottish Government not insist that all the companies that are within its portfolio, such as Glasgow Prestwick Airport, pay the real living wage? I am a great believer in the real living

wage. Why does the Scottish Government not believe in it?

Richard Lochhead: We do believe in the real living wage—and I highlight the opposition from some Conservative members to the conditionality that we are looking at attaching. We are promoting the real living wage. Scotland is in a very good place compared with the rest of the UK in terms of the proportion of employees in our country to whom the real living wage is being paid. We should be proud of that, and it shows great progress. We are top in the UK when it comes to paying the real living wage.

On the relevant powers that the Parliament has, to which Maggie Chapman referred, we are doing all that we can to drive the fair work agenda and strengthen the voice of our workers. That is why organisations that receive Scottish Government grants now need to provide the appropriate channels for effective worker voices, as well as paying at least the real living wage, so that workers are treated fairly and with dignity and respect.

We look forward to working in partnership with the Scottish Trades Union Congress. We want to use days such as today to commemorate—as members have done—the ultimate sacrifice that many workers have made down the generations and to celebrate the progress that the trade union movement and workers have made in this country and around the world to further their own cause and to make the world and workplaces a better place.

Meeting closed at 17:49.

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