



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

# Meeting of the Parliament

Wednesday 18 September 2024

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## Wednesday 18 September 2024

### CONTENTS

	Col.
<b>PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME</b> .....	1
<b>CONSTITUTION, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE, AND PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS</b> .....	1
Channel 4 (Production Outside England) .....	1
Programme for Government (Arts and Culture) .....	2
Youth Culture (Investment) (Cunninghame South) .....	5
Relations with European Union (Discussions with United Kingdom Government) .....	6
Built Heritage and Listed Buildings (Protection) .....	7
Public Libraries (Support) .....	9
Constitutional Policy and Strategy .....	11
<b>JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS</b> .....	13
Police Scotland (Officer Numbers) .....	13
Introduction of Domestic Abuse Register .....	15
His Majesty's Prison and Young Offenders Institution Stirling .....	17
Antisocial Behaviour (Lothian) .....	19
Sam Eljamel (Discussions with Police Scotland) .....	20
E-bikes and E-scooters (Illegal Use) .....	21
His Majesty's Prison Highland (Cost and Completion) .....	23
<b>CREATING A MODERN, DIVERSE AND DYNAMIC SCOTLAND</b> .....	25
<i>Motion moved—[John Swinney].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Douglas Ross].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Anas Sarwar].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Ross Greer].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Alex Cole—Hamilton].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Ash Regan].</i>	
The First Minister (John Swinney) .....	25
Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con) .....	29
Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab) .....	33
Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green) .....	36
Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD) .....	39
Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba) .....	42
Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP) .....	44
Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con) .....	45
James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP) .....	47
Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab) .....	49
Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP) .....	51
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab) .....	53
Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con) .....	55
Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP) .....	57
Ash Regan .....	59
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD) .....	61
Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green) .....	63
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab) .....	65
Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con) .....	67
The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes) .....	70
<b>BUSINESS MOTION</b> .....	74
<i>Motion moved—[Jamie Hepburn]—and agreed to.</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Douglas Ross]—and disagreed to.</i>	
Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con) .....	75
The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Jamie Hepburn) .....	78
<b>PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS</b> .....	85
<i>Motions moved—[Jamie Hepburn].</i>	
<b>DECISION TIME</b> .....	86
<b>INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM (10TH ANNIVERSARY)</b> .....	101
<i>Motion debated—[Lorna Slater]</i>	

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green) .....	101
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP) .....	104
Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	105
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab) .....	107
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green) .....	109
Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP) .....	111
Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con).....	112
Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green).....	113
The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson).....	115

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 18 September 2024

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture, and parliamentary business.

#### Channel 4 (Production Outside England)

**1. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Channel 4 in relation to increasing its made outside England quota from 9 per cent to 16 per cent in line with population breakdown, as called for by Pact, the independent television representative body. (S6O-03717)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** Scottish Government officials have met Channel 4 on several occasions, and I met the chief executive of Channel 4 on 23 May.

In our communications with Channel 4 and the regulator, Ofcom, including letters that were sent on 26 April, 25 June and 28 August, we have challenged the inadequate made outside England quotas that are proposed and have set out our expectation that they should be increased to at least 16 per cent, with individual nation quotas. The Scottish Government also responded to both of Ofcom's consultations on 14 February and 28 August to set out those views.

**Douglas Lumsden:** I am sure that the cabinet secretary shares my anger that Ofcom, instead of proceeding with a 16 per cent quota, chose to proceed with a 12 per cent quota, and even that will not apply until 2030. That will mean that 25 per cent fewer programmes will be made in Scotland and 25 per cent fewer people will be involved than would have been the case if the quota had been accepted.

Scottish freelancers in the independent TV industry are really hurting, and many are being forced out of the industry. What more can the Government do, in conjunction with Pact and Screen Scotland, to protect the industry as it goes through a difficult time?

**Angus Robertson:** I commend Douglas Lumsden for his question and the way in which he framed it. The difference between 12 per cent and 16 per cent might not seem much to people who do not understand how much that is worth but, as he pointed out, the proposed quota represents a 25 per cent underspend, which would have an impact on the television sector in Scotland that would not be welcomed.

Douglas Lumsden asked what more we can do. One thing that has become increasingly apparent is that, in addition to the fact that the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, the Northern Ireland Government and our screen agencies are making the very same points that he has made, we are hearing voices from across Parliaments doing exactly the same thing. I commend him and colleagues in his party and in other parties who are making that point. The more people who make that point between now and final decisions, the better chance we have of getting fairness for spending in Scotland by Channel 4, which we worked so hard to secure in relation to spending in Scotland by the BBC.

#### Programme for Government (Arts and Culture)

**2. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it has had any discussions with organisations in the arts and culture sector since the publication of "Programme for Government 2024-25". (S6O-03718)

I note my entry in the register of members' interests as a supporter of the arts.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** Scottish Government officials and ministers are in regular contact with key stakeholders across the arts and culture sector as part of the normal business of Government. Such engagement has continued since the publication of the programme for government on 4 September.

**Alexander Burnett:** In the past two years, the Scottish National Party Government has repeatedly cut Creative Scotland's budget, only to restore it after a backlash, sometimes framing those reversals as new investment. The recent restoration of the open fund is the latest example of that, after a joint campaign by 150 arts organisations, including Deveron Projects and the Barn in my constituency. Does the cabinet secretary understand how that misleads the sector and undermines trust in the Government?

**Angus Robertson:** I gently point out to Alexander Burnett that it would be misleading to claim that there has been a reduction in culture spending in Scotland, because spending in culture

and the arts in Scotland is up. I appreciate that everybody who cares about the arts and culture sector wishes to see that rise in spending. A commitment has been laid out to a growth of an annual amount of £100 million, which would be a tremendous boost to the sector.

It is really important to recognise that, notwithstanding the pressures and the difficulties, this Government is raising culture spending. I contrast that with the position of the previous and the present United Kingdom Government, which is cutting the spending of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in England, and the Welsh Labour Government, which is cutting funding in Wales. In Scotland, we are increasing funding in culture, and we are trying to do so as quickly as we can.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have three requests for supplementary questions, and I intend to take all three.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary will be aware of the dispute between the Paisley Art Institute and OneRen, which has resulted in the looming possibility of highly valuable local artworks being auctioned off next week. A number of constituents—including the artist Eilidh Montague, who has started a petition—feel passionately that artworks that have been gifted to Paisley should not be lost to the town, through either their sale or their being moved to Glasgow, as has been suggested. Once they are gone, they are gone. Will the Scottish Government look urgently and closely at the issue and offer to convene talks between the two parties to try to find a positive resolution?

**Angus Robertson:** I thank Neil Bibby for his question and for contacting me a number of days ago to highlight the issue, which is a matter of concern to him and to constituents who have raised it with him. I gave him an undertaking that I would raise the issue with senior Scottish Government officials in the culture directorate, so that we can better understand the circumstances that he has outlined to the Parliament. That work is currently being undertaken. I gave him a commitment that I would let him know, during the course of this week, what view we are able to take on the challenge that he has outlined to the Parliament. I intend to get back to him on the details and, if it would be appropriate, I would be content to update the Parliament in due course on progress on the issue.

I intend to work with Neil Bibby, as I have committed to doing, in the spirit in which he raised the issue with me. I very much welcome the way in which he did so.

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** The Labour Government's austerity budget

that is due in October is expected to have a substantial impact on the Scottish Government's finances in the year ahead. Can the cabinet secretary provide further assurances that, despite the cuts that are coming from Westminster, the Scottish Government will continue to invest in the arts and culture sector? Will he provide an update on his latest engagement with the UK Government regarding future finances and the impact that its decisions will have on the Scottish Government's spending plans?

**Angus Robertson:** As I said, it is a matter of fact that the Scottish Government has increased culture sector funding this financial year by more than £15 million, which is the first step towards achieving the First Minister's commitment to invest at least £100 million more annually in culture and the arts by 2028-29. The commitment to additional funding comes despite the challenging budget situation, and it signals the Scottish Government's continued confidence in the culture sector and the value that we place on it.

The Scottish budget continues to face significant challenges, and no additional funding was confirmed in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent statement. As is normal practice, any consequential will be confirmed, in early 2025, as part of the supplementary estimates process. The Scottish Government will, of course, continue to work with the new UK Government to seek clarity on any changes that might have an impact on funding in Scotland.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** The Screen Machine, which is parked outside in Holyrood park, brings cinema to communities that would otherwise have no access to it, but, sadly, its future is under threat. Screen Scotland has provided funding to extend the current machine's lease for two years, which is welcome, but it will take 12 to 18 months to build a new state-of-the-art machine, so the clock is ticking. A fundraising campaign has been launched to raise £100,000 from the public out of the £1.7 million that is required in total for the new machine. The campaign has support from Dame Judi Dench, Alan Cumming and Tide Lines. Without urgent intervention, our rural communities will lose their access to cinema, so what steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that that does not happen?

**Angus Robertson:** I thank Rhoda Grant for her question. The Screen Machine—which matters so much, particularly to our rural and island communities—is funded by Screen Scotland, which is funded by the Scottish Government. We support the retention of that vital lifeline cultural service to rural and island Scotland.

I commend Rhoda Grant for raising the fact that a fundraising drive is under way, and I encourage

all members who are able to support and publicise the campaign to do so. As she did, I visited the Screen Machine outside the Scottish Parliament yesterday. I recommend that colleagues who have not yet visited it do so, because it is absolutely tremendous. I am seized of the need to ensure that the service remains in operation and that there is a replacement mobile cinema. With the help and support of colleagues across the chamber, I am encouraged that we can work towards that, which is a shared objective.

### **Youth Culture (Investment) (Cunninghame South)**

**3. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to invest in supporting youth culture in the Cunninghame South constituency. (S6O-03719)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** The Scottish Government places great importance on cultural activity in the local community. We believe that young people of all backgrounds should have the opportunity to access quality cultural services in their local area.

The Scottish Government supports a range of organisations through Creative Scotland. In the Cunninghame South constituency, those include the Irvine and Dreghorn brass band and the music education partnership We Make Music libraries group, which caters to young people specifically. We also provide upwards of £190,000 in support for North Ayrshire Council's highly regarded youth music initiative programme, which is based in Cunninghame and whose work reaches all schools in the local authority area.

**Ruth Maguire:** I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is increasing funding for culture. Arts and culture are integral parts of a thriving community. This summer, I had the pleasure of visiting Impact Arts, where I saw at first hand the vital work that it does to provide artistic opportunities for young people, the positive impact that it has had on their wellbeing and the prospects that it opens up to them.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that money invested by the Scottish Government through Creative Scotland should be distributed across the country for the benefit of all, to ensure that the arts are developed for young people outside our main cities?

**Angus Robertson:** We know that it is vital to nurture culture and creativity across all of Scotland's communities. The funding that we provide via Creative Scotland reaches individuals, organisations and projects across the whole of Scotland. For example, our long-standing investment—of more than £150 million since

2007—in the youth music initiative continues to support and empower young people in all of Scotland's 32 local authorities. It allows young people to access music-making and learning opportunities, with every pupil being offered a year of free music tuition by the end of primary school.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Katy Clark has a supplementary question.

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** There is no doubt that there have been significant cuts to youth services in recent years. To what extent does the cabinet secretary believe that it is the impact of cuts to councils, in North Ayrshire and elsewhere, that have led to reductions in services, including in arts and culture, that are targeted at young people?

**Angus Robertson:** I have just outlined a series of ways in which cultural provision is being delivered and protected in local authorities, including in the region that Katy Clark represents. If she has particular examples of cultural services that have been cut that I may not be aware of, I would be perfectly happy to take a look at that.

I am absolutely committed to ensuring that Scotland's culture and arts agencies, which deliver in different ways, do so right across Scotland, and that young people—no matter where they are or what their background—are given the option of participating in cultural activities. I look forward to the member reaching out to me with any information that she may have.

### **Relations with European Union (Discussions with United Kingdom Government)**

**4. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the UK Government about improving relations with the European Union, including on rejoining the single market and customs union. (S6O-03720)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** The Scottish Government's long-standing position is that rejoining the single market and the customs union, at the earliest opportunity and as an independent country, represents the best future for Scotland.

Brexit has been and continues to be a disaster for Scotland. I have conveyed to the current UK Government that I welcome its intention to reset the relationship with the EU, and I have made it clear that we must do all that we can to reduce the harm of Brexit wherever possible. The Scottish Government will continue to advocate rejoining the European Union, given the huge benefits that that would bring, including access to the world's largest single market and customs union—a customs

union that is seven times larger than the United Kingdom.

**Kevin Stewart:** A decade ago today, people went to the polls to vote in the independence referendum. They had been told that, to protect our membership of the European Union, they had to vote no. That was not the case, and we found that out to our cost not long after.

Is it not fair to say that, if the UK had not made the disastrous decision to leave the EU, at an estimated cost to the economy of £40 billion per annum, the proposed £22 billion of cuts from the Labour Government might have been avoided entirely?

**Angus Robertson:** Kevin Stewart makes very good points. It is a statement of fact that the Scottish electorate was mis-sold in 2014. It was told that it should vote no to protect Scotland's place in the European Union. Since then, we have been taken out against the democratic will of the majority of people in this country.

Independent research organisations and the Office for Budget Responsibility have been tracking the economic impact of Brexit since the referendum in 2016, when Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the European Union. According to analysis by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, the UK economy was 2.5 per cent smaller in 2023, and it expects that figure to rise to 5.7 per cent by 2035. That equates to around £69 billion in output and £28 billion in public revenues lost as a consequence of Brexit. That immense economic hole is a stark reminder of the price of Labour's continued support for Brexit.

### **Built Heritage and Listed Buildings (Protection)**

**5. Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what work it is doing to enhance protection of the nation's built heritage and listed buildings. (S6O-03721)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** I start by acknowledging Paul Sweeney's long-standing interest in this area. The Scottish Government delivers support for the historic environment through sponsorship of Historic Environment Scotland, the lead public body for the protection and preservation of the historic environment.

As reported in its 2023-24 grants funding report, Historic Environment Scotland delivers more than £13 million of grant funding each year for the protection and promotion of the historic environment in projects across Scotland.

**Paul Sweeney:** The listed ABC venue on Sauchiehall Street was badly damaged in the second Glasgow School of Art fire in 2018 and it has lain derelict ever since. A planning application was recently submitted to build student accommodation on the site, but, within weeks, Glasgow City Council served a dangerous buildings notice on the property, slating it for full demolition. At no point was a conservation accredited engineer consulted to see whether at least the iconic entrance portico could be preserved and incorporated into the design of the new development. Similar situations have prevailed at the Ayr station hotel and, most recently, at the Hillhead Baptist church in the west end of Glasgow.

For the listing process to have the weight that it should have, at the very least, it should be a necessity to consult a registered conservation engineer before any green light is given to demolition. Will the Scottish Government consider the call of Save Britain's Heritage to make it mandatory to seek the advice of a conservation accreditation register of engineers—CARE—accredited structural engineer before any planning authority authorises demolition works?

**Angus Robertson:** Paul Sweeney has raised a number of issues and sites that include planning matters. He will be aware that Scottish Government ministers need to be careful in relation to such issues, because of our quasi-judicial role.

He has raised the issue of the ABC, so it is on the public record and it is, no doubt, being looked at closely. He also raised the issue of Hillhead Baptist church. I am well aware of the detailed objection letter that he has publicised on his website and I know that there is still some time to run for objections to be handed in by constituents who might share his views.

On the issues that Paul Sweeney has raised that go beyond listing and so on, I will revert to officials and write to him with a substantive response, because we all agree that we want to make sure that our historic built environment is protected as much as possible.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** The nature of the materials that are used in historic and listed buildings means that they require traditional skills so that restoration and maintenance can be done sympathetically. What can the Scottish Government do on flexible learning opportunities for young people in island and rural areas, so that they can access and acquire those specialist skills, which would ensure that we have a pipeline of skilled craftspeople across Scotland to help to retain and protect heritage buildings?



**Angus Robertson:** The point that Beatrice Wishart raises is very apposite. I have often heard from colleagues with specific issues focused on stonemasonry, but other traditional skills are essential for us to maintain our historic and built environment. A lot of effort is going on behind the scenes to ensure that our places of learning at a variety of levels allow young people to accrue the skills that are necessary for those undertakings.

I will write to Beatrice Wishart to update her on that. If she has any specific issues relating to her constituency or others in the wider region, I would be keen to hear from her on that.

### Public Libraries (Support)

**6. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to support the retention of Scotland's public libraries. (S6O-03722)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** Scottish Government officials work closely with the Scottish Library and Information Council, which provides leadership and advice to Scottish ministers, local authorities and the wider libraries sector.

In 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25, we provided funding of £665,000 to the SLIC in recognition of the importance of our public libraries and as an expression of our support for the excellent services that libraries provide. That is on top of the Scottish Government's general revenue funding to local authorities and includes the public library improvement fund, which supports creative, sustainable and innovative public library projects throughout the whole of Scotland.

**Richard Leonard:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his reply. Since the Government came to power, spending on our public libraries is down, book stocks are down, the number of library staff is down, and more than 120 public libraries have closed for good. Does the cabinet secretary accept that libraries matter, that they are a vital part of our children's education, that they combat social isolation, that they can help to regenerate our towns and cities, that they represent a world beyond the market—a safe space, run not for profit but for enlightenment—and that, in a digital society, libraries are not needed less but are needed even more? If he does accept that, what does the Government intend to do about it?

**Angus Robertson:** I agree entirely with everything that we just heard about the importance of libraries for both individuals and communities. That is why—Richard Leonard heard my initial answer—the Scottish Government has committed the resources that it has committed to protect and support the provision of library services across

Scotland. There is also an onus on local government to maintain provision—he knows that as well I do—and we need to work in partnership to ensure that we maintain libraries as a service the length and breadth of Scotland.

If Richard Leonard wishes to highlight any particular issues, I ask him to get in touch with me. Perhaps at the next vote on the Scottish Government's budget he might wish to exercise his vote to support the resources that are being put into libraries.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I hope to take all three requests for supplementary questions, but I need co-operation in the form of brief questions and brief answers.

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide adequate public library services, and the Labour administration of South Lanarkshire Council is overseeing the closure of three libraries in my constituency in Cambuslang, Halfway and Blantyre, which represents 75 per cent of the main libraries in my constituency. That is happening despite residents' deep concern about the impact that the closures will have.

Does the minister agree that it is crucial that local authorities maintain the strategic overview of library services, even if they are commissioned by arm's-length bodies, and that meaningful consultation with communities must precede any service changes?

**Angus Robertson:** Given the rhetoric that we heard a moment ago, it is very disappointing to hear that Labour local authorities, such as Clare Haughey's own, are cutting library services and closing libraries. Public libraries in Scotland are devolved to local authorities, and they have a statutory duty to ensure that there is adequate provision of library services for residents. However, the Scottish Government recognises the significant financial pressures and community-level impacts that flow from 14 years of Westminster austerity. The Labour Government has confirmed that it is to continue that austerity, with £22 billion-worth of public spending cuts.

With all roads leading back to Westminster, as we hear and as the Labour Government acknowledges, the First Minister has been clear that we need an injection of investment in our public services, not more cuts.

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** SNP Government cuts have led to a 14 per cent reduction in Scotland's public libraries, with the public library improvement fund addressing only a fraction of the funding problems that they face. What specific action will the cabinet secretary take to address the on-going impact of those cuts, beyond the scope of that fund?

**Angus Robertson:** I will tell you what, Presiding Officer, I am certainly not going to take any lessons on supporting public services from the party of austerity. It really does take a—*[Interruption.]* It really does take—*[Interruption.]* It really does take a brass neck—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Stewart! Cabinet secretary—please resume.

**Angus Robertson:** It really does take a brass neck to do that, and no matter how much one shouts on the issue, it does not get us beyond the fact that it was the UK Conservative Party that implemented austerity. The impact on public spending has been felt the length and breadth of the UK, including Scotland, so I encourage Alexander Stewart to recant on the austerity that his party has been responsible for and to, at least, acknowledge that that might have some impact on the level of public funding in the UK—not least in England, where, under his party's responsibility, cuts to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have been vast.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** Is it not the reality that since the Conservatives came to power in 2010, the number of UK libraries has fallen dramatically under the austerity agenda? What assessment has been made of the impact of Tory-led budget cuts on public libraries in Scotland, as well as of the future impact and consequences of the continued austerity measures that the Labour Party supports?

**Angus Robertson:** If people did not already understand, it is becoming ever clearer that the austerity politics—the reduction of and constraints on public funding in the United Kingdom—have an impact—*[Interruption.]* I do not understand why Conservative members are shaking their heads. That is a matter of financial fact. UK Government austerity is having a significant impact on public spending in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. That is a fact.

It would be good if Conservative members and others at least recognised that austerity has an impact on public services, including libraries. I and my colleagues will not cease pointing that out to the Parliament and the public, given that that is why people voted to get rid of the Conservatives and believed that change was coming with Labour—which, sadly, it did not.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can squeeze in question 7, but I need co-operation to have brief questions and answers.

### Constitutional Policy and Strategy

**7. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, regarding any impact on the development of its constitutional policy and strategy, what its position is on whether

the promises made by the leaders of the three main United Kingdom unionist parties prior to the 2014 independence referendum, known as the vow, have been kept. (S6O-03723)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** Following the Smith commission, the Parliament received some additional powers—far less than what was promised 10 years ago in the lead up to the independence referendum.

We have used those powers to improve the lives of the people of Scotland. However, the last UK Government demonstrated that Westminster could block those powers at the drop of a hat. We know that the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, breaches of the Sewel convention and interventions in devolved policies and spending are evidence of that.

There is now an opportunity for the current UK Government to address the damage that its predecessor inflicted. We stand ready to work with it to reset the relationship, and to protect and enhance the powers of this Parliament.

**Kenneth Gibson:** A decade on, in budget terms, the Scottish Parliament has no control whatsoever over VAT; national insurance; corporation tax; inheritance tax; fuel, tobacco and alcohol duty; and so on, yet Rishi Sunak, Alister Jack and Ian Murray, who is the new Secretary of State for Scotland, preposterously described the Parliament as

“the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world.”

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the Parliament's powers pale in comparison to those of the states in the United States, German Länders, Swiss cantons, Canadian provinces and Australian states, all of which have constitutionally embedded rights and sweeping powers over taxation and spending? That is not to mention British Crown dependencies such as the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey.

**Angus Robertson:** Kenneth Gibson is absolutely right: perhaps that will end the nonsensical claims to the contrary by some members of the Parliament.

With the limited powers that were handed to the Scottish Parliament under the Smith commission, the Scottish Government has made a real difference in areas where Westminster has not. Policies that Social Security Scotland administers, such as the Scottish child payment, are helping to keep an estimated 100,000 children out of poverty in Scotland.

There is a growing demand for further devolution of powers to Scotland in areas including employment rights, immigration and drugs law, based on the understanding that the

Scottish Government can legislate only with the best interests of the people of Scotland at heart. The same cannot be said for Westminster.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 8 has not been lodged.

That concludes portfolio questions on constitution, external affairs and culture, and parliamentary business. There will be a short pause before we move to the next portfolio to allow front-bench teams to change positions.

## Justice and Home Affairs

### Police Scotland (Officer Numbers)

**1. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of police service strength, in light of the decrease in Police Scotland's officer numbers. (S6O-03725)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** It is important to recognise that the recruitment of police officers is a matter for the chief constable. Nonetheless, despite the deeply challenging financial circumstances, our budget settlement for 2024-25 for Police Scotland includes an additional £75.7 million to protect front-line policing.

As the chief constable confirmed to the Criminal Justice Committee, that budget settlement will enable Police Scotland to bring officer numbers up to around 16,500 to 16,600. It should be noted that Police Scotland has welcomed more than 690 new officers since March and more than 1,280 new recruits since the beginning of 2023, with further intakes planned throughout this year. Police Scotland is set to take on more recruits this year than at any time since 2013.

**Tess White:** The number of female probationers in Police Scotland has nosedived by almost a third since 2021. A damning independent report into the force's so-called equality, diversity and inclusion activities was quietly published by Police Scotland last month. It found

"pervasive attitudes of misogyny and sexism across all areas and divisions."

It also describes

"a hostile environment for women who may choose to leave their careers early."

The Scottish National Party Government cannot look the other way, and alarm bells are ringing. How will the Scottish Government hold Police Scotland to account, to ensure that it creates a safe space for female employees?

**Angela Constance:** First, it should be acknowledged that this Parliament decided on the basis of the separation of powers and, therefore,

decided that it is for the Scottish Police Authority to hold Police Scotland and the chief constable directly to account.

On the substantive issue that Ms White raises about the decreasing number of female probationers, I share that concern. I was pleased when Police Scotland opened up its site in Jackton as another recruitment centre in addition to Tulliallan. The member may be aware that Tulliallan is a residential training facility for probationers. The purpose of Jackton is to allow people to train to be police officers on a non-residential basis. I hope that that will help to increase the diversity of the workforce.

I also point to the work that Lady Elish Angiolini undertook on the cultural aspects that the member raises and the progress that we have made in implementing the non-legislative recommendations with regard to that important work. We have embarked on and have just passed stage 1 of the Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Bill, which is all about culture.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Members have a number of supplementary questions.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** The reality remains that the decisions that the United Kingdom Labour Government has made in the short time since it came to power will fundamentally damage our ability to deliver public services in Scotland. Public services need investment, as Scottish Labour frequently reminds us, and we cannot cut our way to more police officers. What assessment has been made of the threat that continued Westminster austerity poses to vital public services such as our police service?

**Angela Constance:** In the face of financial challenges, this Government has made it clear that we will provide support where it is needed most, including through our public services such as policing. We all know that Labour austerity is as damaging as Tory austerity when it comes to public service cuts. Ahead of its autumn budget, we have again called on the UK Government to ensure that it prioritises investment in public services and infrastructure, because we know from experience that yet more Westminster austerity is not the answer that public services such as policing require, and they must be protected.

**Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** Up to 500 police officers are called to court every single day, but many of them end up not giving evidence. Criminal trials conclude much more quickly when there is footage from body-worn cameras, but most of Scotland's officers still do not have that basic kit. Does the cabinet secretary agree that its

full and speedy roll-out is critical to improving policing strength in Scotland?

**Angela Constance:** Yes, I do. That is why this Government—despite having our capital budget cut in real terms by nearly 9 per cent—ensured that the capital budget for Police Scotland for this financial year increased by 12.5 per cent.

I am pleased that Police Scotland has announced that the contract with Motorola is now signed. I am also pleased with the update that the chief constable gave to the Scottish Police Authority. It should be welcomed that, by spring next year, the first tranche of more than 10,000 body-worn video cameras will be rolled out, with the roll-out period continuing over the forthcoming 12 months. The chief constable will provide updates not only to the Scottish Police Authority and the Scottish Government but to the Criminal Justice Committee.

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** From January 2022 to July this year, more than 1 million 101 calls were missed because the caller was disconnected or simply hung up. In June 2023, 41 per cent of all calls went unanswered. The longest a successful caller had to hang on was an hour and 23 minutes. What is the cabinet secretary doing to address that inadequate service?

**Angela Constance:** It is important for me to say that the Government has challenged the statistics that the member quoted. We try to do that in the lines that are issued to the newspaper concerned. I am happy to follow that up in more detail with Ms Clark.

It is also important to recognise that, in an emergency, people should, first and foremost, call 999, which has a good record of meeting its obligations within the 10-second window. However, in general, there is always more to do. People can contact Police Scotland in a number of ways, such as via email if that is appropriate. Obviously, 101 is not an emergency service. It is important to underline that 999 is the emergency service.

### Introduction of Domestic Abuse Register

2. **Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports of senior lawyers seeking the introduction of a domestic abuse register. (S6O-03726)

**The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown):** The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs and I are happy to consider any innovative policy intervention that furthers our commitment to do more for victims of domestic abuse, including considering how it would interact with existing initiatives.

Pam Gosal will be aware that the disclosure scheme for domestic abuse Scotland provides individuals with the right to ask the police about a partner's background if they suspect a history of domestic abuse. It also enables Police Scotland to tell people that they may be at risk even if that information has not been asked for.

**Pam Gosal:** My proposal for a domestic abuse register has received cross-party support and the backing of many charities and organisations. Now, Thomas Ross KC has spoken movingly about the difference that a register could make. He says that it could prevent attacks and keep people safe.

There were 62,000 domestic abuse incidents last year. That is horrific and it needs to change. What is the minister waiting for? Should the Government not act now and agree to introduce a register immediately?

**Siobhian Brown:** I know that Pam Gosal is passionate about the subject. Violence against women is a fundamental violation of human rights, and the Scottish Government recognises that.

The Scottish Government is aware that the Scottish Conservatives' paper "United Against Violence: An all-Scotland approach to tackling domestic abuse" includes the member's proposal for a domestic abuse prevention bill. I met the member prior to the consultation on the proposal going out. We await more operational detail and are not able to commit to something without seeing the full details, which I am sure Pam Gosal will appreciate. However, as I said in my first answer, we are happy to consider any proposals that make the lives of the victims of domestic abuse easier.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** It was welcome that the Scottish Government's programme for government affirmed that steps would be taken to ensure that the equally safe delivery plan continues to be implemented. Will the minister speak to the funding that is being provided and how the plan will help to prevent and eradicate violence against women?

**Siobhian Brown:** Front-line services on violence against women are crucial to ensuring the safety of, and support to, survivors. We are investing record levels of funding to support people through a range of front-line specialist services.

Our equally safe strategy is aimed at preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls and is focused on early intervention, prevention and support. It is backed by £19 million of annual funding from our delivering equally safe fund, which has supported 121 projects from 112 organisations since October 2021.

### His Majesty's Prison and Young Offenders Institution Stirling

**3. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met with the Scottish Prison Service to discuss the findings of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland's report on the full inspection of HMP and YOI Stirling. (S6O-03727)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** I welcome the inspection report from HMIPS, and I am encouraged to hear that HM chief inspector of prisons believes that Scotland is leading the way when it comes to managing women in custody. During my visit to HMP and YOI Stirling last month, I saw first hand the profoundly positive impact that the establishment is having on women in custody.

Although the chief inspector highlights many areas of good practice, the SPS acknowledges that there is always room for learning and improvement. Through my regular discussions with the SPS chief executive, Teresa Medhurst, I am aware that the Prison Service is working to build on the positive tone of the chief inspector's report.

**Mark Ruskell:** We know and acknowledge that community-based, trauma-informed facilities are key to breaking those cycles of pain and reoffending and that that remains at the heart of the new facility at HMP Stirling and the excellent work that goes on there.

That said, this recent report from the inspectorate confirmed what my constituents have been saying for over a year, which is that major design flaws at HMP Stirling have caused protracted issues with noise that have been distressing for people living both inside and outside the prison. Can the cabinet secretary update me on what lessons have been learned to ensure that future facilities do not have the same mistakes built into them? Can she assure me that the SPS will provide a clear timeline on the delivery of noise mitigation measures at HMP Stirling as soon as possible?

**Angela Constance:** I am aware that Mr Ruskell most recently met the deputy chief executive of the SPS on 11 September, and I am also aware that the Prison Service, residents and local councillors met in the establishment to discuss the noise issue. I reassure Mr Ruskell and indeed other members that I continue to discuss the issue with the chief executive, because it is in everybody's interest that it is resolved.

When the new prison was being built, the old one had to remain in operation. I know that the Prison Service is focused on timelines, in addition to the interpersonal interventions that it makes to

support women to reduce the noise. The service is also liaising with engineering professionals and acousticians. It is awaiting a formal report from the acousticians, and it is also liaising with the local authority environmental health team, as well as residents, because we all want this to be resolved.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. There are a number of supplementaries.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** Can the cabinet secretary provide details on how the Scottish Prison Service strategy for women in custody, supported by significant investment from the Scottish Government, has changed how we support the rehabilitation of women in prison?

**Angela Constance:** The SPS strategy for women in custody represented a step change in the way that Scotland views and treats women in custody by considering their very likely experience of adversity and trauma. The opening of HMP Stirling was a key milestone for the strategy to care for women, representing a third new facility built specifically for women in custody and demonstrating an unprecedented period of investment to support women in custody.

The innovative and groundbreaking women's facilities help to create a culture that is founded on positive relationships, trust and self-worth. By delivering a range of offending behaviour programmes, other therapeutic interventions and holistic wellbeing services, the SPS has created an environment that fosters change and supports women on their rehabilitative journey.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** On my last visit to HMP Stirling, I was made aware of some women offenders who have psychiatric conditions; the prison is not equipped to deal with them. That seems to be the key reason why the local people that Mark Ruskell mentioned are experiencing shouting from the prison.

I am also aware that the Government has responded to questions that I and others have raised about Carstairs hospital having no female places. In view of that, is the Scottish Government assessing the various needs of women offenders serving a sentence who require specialist psychiatric services?

**Angela Constance:** I am pleased to advise the member that I work closely with health colleagues. As a former prison social worker, I am very clear about what prison care and custody provides and what it does not. I am also a former hospital social worker at the Carstairs State Hospital. We are planning for high-secure provision for women in the state hospital. The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport met relevant health board chief executives in April to discuss that proposition. Although the work is at a very early stage, we are absolutely committed to working

with health boards to improve access for women to forensic mental health services. We will continue to do that as the longer-term proposition at the State Hospital is developed.

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** HMP YOI Stirling's inspection report found positive aspects of good practice at the prison, but a number of design flaws were indicated. We all already know about the issues that that has created for the neighbourhood, including noise. What action will be taken to mitigate as far as possible the difficulties that the residents are facing and the impact that the prison is having on their community?

**Angela Constance:** I say to Mr Stewart and others who have advocated on behalf of the residents that every action will be taken. I will continue to liaise closely with the Prison Service on the matter.

### Antisocial Behaviour (Lothian)

4. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour in Lothian. (S6O-03728)

**The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown):** We support Police Scotland and local authorities to continue to invest in prevention, early intervention and diversionary activities to reduce antisocial behaviour. A wide range of powers are available to Police Scotland, and it is best placed to lead on addressing those issues locally, ensuring that there is an appropriate response to the issues and circumstances in which the behaviour is taking place.

I recognise that antisocial behaviour can be complex. An independent working group on antisocial behaviour is examining our strategic approach to it. The group is undertaking widespread engagement to deliver its report later this year. We have committed in the programme for government to act on the group's recommendations.

**Sarah Boyack:** I welcome the minister's response. I alert her to the fact that recent reports have shown that antisocial behaviour has had a major impact on local communities, which includes Lothian Buses pulling services due to an increase in antisocial behaviour. In West Lothian, there has been an increase of 12 per cent in antisocial behaviour, including vandalism and breach of the peace.

I welcome the fact that the minister is putting together a working party, but does she accept that communities need support now to tackle antisocial behaviour? Does she accept that—because local authorities are underresourced, which has had an

impact on youth groups and community spaces—many young people in Lothian simply do not have the options, opportunities and support that they need? Can the minister tell us exactly what is going to happen to tackle the underlying issues that create antisocial behaviour in the first place?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I think that the minister has got your drift.

**Siobhian Brown:** First of all, such behaviour is absolutely unacceptable. Everyone has a right to feel safe in their communities. I completely condemn all such behaviour and urge anyone with information of such incidents that have taken place recently in Lothian to contact the police.

I am aware that East Lothian currently has two multi-agency groups that are focused on tackling antisocial behaviour, which are the antisocial behaviour overview group and the weekly tasking and co-ordinating group. I am also aware of a collaborative approach with Police Scotland and local authorities. I have visited one of those groups in East Lothian to see the work that those individuals do to tackle antisocial behaviour. A lot of work is currently happening in that area.

**Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** I have been contacted by businesses, residents and visitors in Leith, Edinburgh regarding escalating issues of antisocial behaviour outside Newkirkgate shopping centre. It is becoming a common occurrence for assaults to take place and for needles to be left lying on the ground. Although the joined-up approach as set out in the review on antisocial behaviour is necessary, short-term action must also be taken. Can the minister advise how the Scottish Government is empowering the police to stop antisocial behaviour as it happens?

**Siobhian Brown:** We recognise that there is no quick fix to tackle and prevent antisocial behaviour. That is why, having seen the projects that I just mentioned to Sarah Boyack, I am strongly supportive of partnership working and delivering positive outcomes. I have also asked for the Scottish Community Safety Network to look at promoting best practice in partnership, working for the benefits of all local authorities. Police Scotland is also involved in all those groups to tackle antisocial behaviour.

### Sam Eljamel (Discussions with Police Scotland)

5. **Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Police Scotland regarding possible criminal charges against the former NHS Tayside surgeon, Sam Eljamel. (S6O-03729)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** Scottish Government officials met Police Scotland in June

to discuss the establishment of the public inquiry and other developing work. As there is currently an on-going Police Scotland investigation into the practices of Mr Eljamel, it would not be appropriate for the Scottish Government to comment further.

**Michael Marra:** Last week, Pat Kelly and Jules Rose, two victims of Eljamel and tireless campaigners for justice for all victims, staged a protest outside the Dundee police headquarters. Their protest marked six years since complaints were lodged regarding former NHS Tayside surgeon Sam Eljamel. Police officers have spent a decade fighting for justice. The content of the case is not a matter for the cabinet secretary, but the performance of our police is. Surely the cabinet secretary cannot believe that a six-year delay is in any way acceptable.

**Angela Constance:** I know that Mr Marra and others, in particular Liz Smith, have diligently advocated on behalf of former patients of Mr Eljamel. I am also aware of the representations that those campaigners and those who were impacted have made to Police Scotland, and I acknowledge the timeframes that were referenced by Mr Marra. If I may, I will point to the public statement that Police Scotland made, which said:

“This is an extremely complex investigation which is being investigated by specialist officers from the Major Investigation Team. Enquiries remain ongoing and we continue to work alongside partner agencies.”

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** A year ago, at First Minister’s question time, I asked the then First Minister, Humza Yousaf, whether the Scottish Government would consider a victim support fund for the patients, not least because of the delays that Mr Marra has just cited. I need not repeat to the chamber the fact that those patients are undergoing terrible physical and mental problems. Will the Government please continue to support them?

**Angela Constance:** The very last thing that I would do to Liz Smith or, indeed, to victims is stand here and make promises that I might or might not be able to keep, so I say to her that I would be more than happy to discuss the matter with her in further detail.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I advise members that we have three more questions to get through and less than eight minutes in which to do so. Questions and answers must be succinct, and we will see what we can do.

### **E-bikes and E-scooters (Illegal Use)**

6. **Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide further details of what it is doing to ensure that Police Scotland has enough officers to deal with

antisocial behaviour resulting from the illegal use of e-bikes and e-scooters. (S6O-03730)

**The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown):** The Scottish Government’s budget for 2024-25 includes record police total funding of £1.55 billion, which is an increase of £92.7 million on the previous year. That funding will allow the chief constable to develop her plans to deliver on her commitment to strengthen the force through the revised model of policing, including enabling the service to restart recruitment and increase office numbers.

Police Scotland has welcomed more than 690 new officers since March this year, and more than 1,280 new recruits since the beginning of 2023. Further intakes are planned throughout this year.

It is important to reiterate that deployment of those resources is an operational matter for Police Scotland. However, I remind the chamber that it is presently illegal to use an e-scooter on public roads, footpaths or cycle lanes in Scotland.

**Sue Webber:** The latest official statistics show that Scotland has the lowest number of officers in at least 17 years. Meanwhile, recorded crime is rising and we are repeatedly told that Police Scotland is underresourced and overstretched. At the same time, I hear repeated reports of havoc being caused by the misuse and illegal use of e-bikes and e-scooters—I even saw an e-skateboard the other day. People in my region have reported being frightened by masked gangs using those vehicles and have detailed significant concerns for their safety, with little action being taken.

Other than the financial support that the minister has outlined, what more can the Scottish Government do to protect communities and to punish those who choose to cause trouble with those illegal vehicles?

**Siobhian Brown:** We share the member’s concerns and those of the public regarding the antisocial behaviour that can be associated with those vehicles, which might be used illegally and are a safety risk not just to the public and other motorists but to the riders, as well as to the police.

As Sue Webber is no doubt aware, the legislation that governs the registration of off-road vehicles is reserved to the United Kingdom Government. We fully support Police Scotland and its partners in dealing with illegal and irresponsible use.

Local policing teams are best placed to use intelligence and engage with communities to identify where misuse of such vehicles is causing concern, and that ensures that those hotspot areas can be prioritised to prevent future instances

and deal with those who are engaged in the misuse of vehicles.

**His Majesty's Prison Highland  
(Cost and Completion)**

**7. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether the new HMP Highland will be completed by 2026 without further exceeding the reported current cost overrun of £157 million, which is a 300 per cent increase compared with the original cost. (S6O-03731)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** Following the award of the construction contract for HMP Highland in April this year, the construction is progressing to plan on site and is scheduled to be complete in 2026, within the reported budget.

Early estimates of cost were made more than a decade ago, before a design and a site had been identified. Since then, years of inflation and changing economic conditions have impacted on the price.

**Edward Mountain:** I am pleased to hear that the prison might be completed on time, although I am still not sure whether to believe that.

What steps will be taken to ensure that, when it is completed, prison accommodation will be available for female prisoners?

**Angela Constance:** I am glad to hear that Mr Mountain is now advocating for the delivery of that much-needed new establishment for the Highlands. I was made aware recently that he opposed the original site at Milton of Leys, which would not have helped with timescales but, nonetheless, he has his democratic rights.

The point that he raises about female prisoners is important, given the geography of the Highlands. There will be provision to accommodate a small number of women at the site.

**Edward Mountain:** On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer. I think that the minister was disingenuous when she responded to my question. I opposed the site at Milton of Leys, which is not where the prison is being built. Will the minister correct the record to say that I did not oppose construction of a Highland prison? I have been supporting it since 2006.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I thank Mr Mountain for his contribution; the matter is noted.

Time is tight this afternoon, so we will have to conclude portfolio questions on justice and home affairs. I apologise to the member whose question was published in the *Business Bulletin* that I was

not able to call her question, and to a member who sought to ask a supplementary question.

There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business to allow the front-bench teams to change positions.



## Creating a Modern, Diverse and Dynamic Scotland

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

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-14524, in the name of John Swinney, on creating a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I call John Swinney to speak to and move the motion.

14:59

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** From my experience of taking part in every year of this Parliament since it was reconvened 25 years ago, one thing is clear—no matter where any of us sit in this chamber, we each stood for election because we care deeply about Scotland's future. We stood for election because we know that decisions about Scotland's future are best determined by people who live in Scotland. No matter where we sit in this chamber, we agree that it is our aspiration that Scotland maintains her place in the world as a modern, diverse and dynamic nation.

Scotland is the home of poets, painters, engineers, doctors and thinkers throughout the ages. We are a nation on the cutting edge of solving many of the 21st century's most complex challenges. We are an outward-looking country that values our relationship with our neighbours and friends across the world, and it is in that spirit that I open the debate this afternoon.

There exists in Scotland a range of opinions and emotions that we must embrace and discuss openly and respectfully. As I am about to set out, to do so is to maintain the very health of our democracy itself—a democracy that each of us has stood for election to represent. It is a story of the pursuit of self-determination, which found new momentum when, in 1997, the people of Scotland voted overwhelmingly to reconvene the Scottish Parliament. It was clear then, and it is clear now, that Scotland is a nation with all the talent, creativity and ingenuity to chart her own course and to steer her own democratic institutions.

The positive impact of devolution is indisputable. For 25 years, devolution has improved the lives of people in Scotland, making this a better and fairer place to live, through policies such as equal marriage; free personal care for older people; minimum unit pricing for alcohol; free bus travel for more than 2 million people; a ban on smoking in public places; land reform; and—something that is very close to my heart—action on child poverty through measures such as the Scottish child payment.

Among many other achievements since 2007, this Government has used the powers of devolution to introduce the baby box, which supports every baby born and resident in Scotland to have the best start in life by providing families with essential items that are needed in the first six months of a child's life. We have also ensured that Scotland-domiciled students continue to receive free university tuition, unlike elsewhere in the United Kingdom, given that we abolished the graduate endowment fee in 2008. We have introduced free prescriptions, which are now £9.90 per item south of the border, which is a huge cost for low-income families.

Our council tax reduction scheme reduces the tax bills of more than 450,000 people in Scotland, and free personal and nursing care has been extended to everyone who needs it, regardless of age. There is the affordable housing programme, which has delivered 128,000 affordable homes, the majority of which are for social rent. Of course, there is also the provision of 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare. If families were to purchase the funded childcare that is provided by the Scottish Government, it would cost more than £5,500 per eligible child per year.

None of that has been achieved by the Scottish Government in isolation, but through the strength of this Parliament and our common commitment to Scotland's self-determination. Therefore, regardless of where members sit in this chamber, and regardless of whether members view everything that I have listed as successes, I trust that members will agree that people living in Scotland are substantially better off with a Parliament that fights their corner, leads for progress and champions the value of our unique and diverse communities, from every single corner of our country.

Each of us in the chamber is extremely fortunate, for the Parliament gives us each a voice, and whenever we enter this building, as unique as Scotland itself, it reminds us of our duty to ensure that the people of Scotland are heard, too. Our modern, diverse and dynamic democracy is our greatest asset. In many ways, 2014 was a year that proved that. The bill on equal marriage passed, which was one of the most progressive equal marriage bills in the world, and it sent out a clear message about who we are as a nation. Turnout for the independence referendum was the highest recorded at any Scotland-wide poll since the advent of universal suffrage.

That referendum was preceded by a genuine and serious national debate on the future of our nation. I wish to acknowledge that the national debate was not easy for every voter. There were certainly lively discussions, but maintaining a healthy democracy is hard, because it requires us

to navigate our differences respectfully. If that were easy, we would not observe the sharp rises in populism that can emerge in times of economic hardship and uncertainty. However, when I think back to 10 years ago, I can think of no better example of modern democracy in action. Both the Scottish and the United Kingdom Governments published detailed papers of their arguments. There were vigorous campaigns and grass-roots involvement of people across the country, and the historic importance of the decision was reflected in the length of time allowed for both sides to make their cases.

The people of Scotland were able to take their decision. My firm view is that the people of Scotland should have the opportunity to take that decision again. This Parliament has confirmed its belief that it should be open to any nation of the United Kingdom to choose to withdraw from the union by democratic means. That is my view, and I believe that that view of this Parliament should be respected.

It is clear that, since the 2014 independence referendum and, sadly, since Brexit, which Scotland did not vote for, the powers and autonomy of the Scottish Parliament have been eroded. They have been eroded, on the excuse of Brexit, to enable Westminster to overrule this Parliament. The people of this country who voted for this Parliament to have the powers that it does were not asked whether they wanted the powers to be eroded.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** As the First Minister is speaking about powers, will he outline how many powers he has been offered by the UK Government but has returned to it because the Scottish National Party Government was not ready to take them on?

**The First Minister:** It is clear from what I have set out so far, and from my comments earlier today, that, since the independence referendum in 2014, there has been a strengthening of some of the powers of this Parliament on tax, which we have used. Mr Ross complains about the fact that we have used our tax powers. We have used the powers on welfare, for example, with the Scottish child payment, which is helping to keep 100,000 children out of poverty. Mr Ross voted against the budget that provided for that, so he does not exactly have a strong argument to stand on.

The point that I am concerned about—

**Douglas Ross:** It is the powers that—

**The First Minister:** The powers that I am concerned about are the powers of this Parliament that the people of Scotland voted for in a democratic referendum in 1997. Those powers have been eroded by legislation that Mr Ross voted for in the House of Commons.

The weakening of our powers—this is the point that I make to Mr Ross—should concern every one of us here, for it is our duty to ensure that this Parliament's powers to represent Scotland's will and Scotland's aspirations should be protected.

**Douglas Ross:** I will try a different question, then. Will the First Minister tell this Parliament one power that the UK Government has taken away from the Scottish Government?

**The First Minister:** The use of the internal market—

**Douglas Ross:** One power that has been taken away.

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Ross.

**The First Minister:** I will explain to Mr Ross exactly what has happened, if he is not familiar with what he has voted for. This Parliament had exclusive power over a range of competences devolved by the United Kingdom Parliament. That was what was put to people in the 1997 referendum, and it was supported by three to one, if my memory serves me correctly. However, the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 gives the UK Government the ability to legislate on and act in those areas. That is called the erosion of the powers of the Scottish Parliament.

That is before I get to the point that, between 1997 and 2019, when there were Labour, Conservative and Conservative-Liberal coalitions in Westminster, the Sewel convention was never ignored on any occasion. However, following that period, the Conservative Government ignored, superseded and countermanded that on countless occasions, legislating over the heads of this democratically elected institution. That should be a matter of the greatest concern to the Conservatives, as it is to me today.

Scotland has prospered with the use of the devolved powers that we have at our disposal. In the aftermath of the 1997 referendum, Scotland demonstrated that we had the capability to assume those powers. Since then, Scotland's economy has outperformed the UK in growth, in gross domestic product per person, in growth in productivity, in earnings growth and in foreign direct investment. We have an impressive record on GDP per capita, which has grown faster than the UK's since 2007. Since 2007, productivity in Scotland has grown at an average rate faster than that in the rest of the United Kingdom.

When we look at the evidence from comparable independent European states—many of which are the same size as Scotland—we can see that they perform better than the United Kingdom. For me, that poses the question, "What is the opportunity for Scotland to move forward?" The opportunity for Scotland is to ensure that we deploy the strength

and capability of our country to the maximum effect for the future of our country, ensuring that decisions made in Scotland by the Scottish Parliament are respected and able to be effective across all the areas of policy that any Government would take for granted.

I believe that an independent Scotland should be able to rejoin the European Union and pursue the prospects of growth and opportunity that so many of our people and our businesses want to enjoy. I believe that an independent Scotland could deliver a fairer and more welcoming system of migration, helping the economy to grow while addressing depopulation challenges and supporting vital public services. I believe that an independent Scotland would remove, sensibly and safely, nuclear weapons from Scotland's shores for good, and that an independent Scotland would be able to benefit from the terms of a written constitution and from investment in our public services, using our wealth to secure the future of our country.

All of that is possible, based on the experience of devolution and Scottish self-determination, and on the principle that decisions taken about this country are best taken by the people who choose to live here and those who are elected to act on their behalf. That is the foundation of the argument for Scottish independence. It is the foundation of what people have experienced with devolution. It is urgent and essential that Scotland becomes independent, and the motion in my name sets out that case.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Government should use all its powers to build a modern, diverse, dynamic nation, and further agrees that it is only with all the powers of a normal independent nation that Scotland would truly be enabled to take its own decisions to fully meet the needs of the people of Scotland and create their best future.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Douglas Ross to speak to and to move amendment S6M-14524.4.

15:11

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I want to start by imagining a different decade to the one that we have had—not a different outcome on 18 September 2014, because the people of Scotland voted by a clear margin to remain part of the United Kingdom.

No—I want to imagine what would have happened if John Swinney and his fellow nationalists had been true to their word and respected the result, and if they had used the past 10 years and the powers of this Parliament to focus on improving the lives of every man, woman and child in this country. Sadly, they did not.

Even a decade on, we are not discussing what this Parliament or this Government could do to benefit our constituents. No—we are, yet again, debating independence.

Unlike the nationalists, I refuse to talk Scotland down. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear Mr Ross.

**Douglas Ross:** I believe that Scotland is a modern, dynamic and diverse country—that is set out in my amendment. However, the SNP does not believe that; that is clear from John Swinney's motion. What a brutal self-assessment of its 17 years in office and of how it has failed this country.

Where there are failures and challenges facing all of us in Scotland, they have been caused not by the decision of millions of Scots to remain in the United Kingdom, but by the SNP—by the nationalists in Government over the past 17 years. They have been caused by a distracted nationalist Government that has spent its time in office obsessing about the constitution rather than focusing on the real priorities for Scots.

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):** I am a big fan of being true to your word. What would have happened if the Conservatives had been true to their word, when they said, "Vote no to stay in the EU, vote no to be an equal partner in the UK, vote no to be more prosperous"? What happened to those promises?

**Douglas Ross:** I am sorry, but the Deputy First Minister cannot pick and choose. "One choice" is what the nationalists told us in 2014. They said that it was a "once-in-a-generation" opportunity and a "gold-plated referendum", which they would respect—but they have spent the past decade refusing to do so. I was speaking about the impact that that has had.

Let us look at Scotland after almost two decades of the SNP in charge. We are a country where alcohol and drugs kill thousands of people every year, and where educational standards continue to fall and violence in our classrooms continues to rise.

And, yes, Neil Gray—our NHS is in crisis. He is shaking his head—

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

**Douglas Ross:** I cannot believe that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care does not believe that our health service is in crisis. I am happy to give way if he can tell us why it is not, when one in six of our fellow Scots is on an NHS waiting list.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** I refuse to talk down the work of

the incredible staff and committed workforce in our health service. The First Minister provided a list of the Government's interventions over our time in government, but I will pick just one—free prescriptions. The Trussell Trust has assessed that 68 per cent of people on universal credit in the rest of the UK cannot afford to pick up their prescriptions. Can Douglas Ross not understand the value—from not just a social perspective but a health perspective—of our investment in free prescriptions?

**Douglas Ross:** Can the health secretary not understand that we have the highest number of drug deaths not just in the United Kingdom but across Europe and that one in six people are on an NHS waiting list? That is a crisis. The fact that he refuses or is unwilling to accept that will be a bitter blow to people watching this debate who are on an NHS waiting list, waiting for treatment or an appointment, and who just do not get it, because of the Government's obsession with independence.

Far from accepting the result of the referendum, the SNP has, in every year since the vote did not go the way that it wanted, called for a rerun. It is as though the first vote did not count and was a proxy one, so the SNP could come back to the issue later. It is as though Scottish voters somehow did not understand or realise the choice that they faced. Democracy is not about asking the same question time and again until people get the result that they want. It is about putting forward arguments, trusting the people with the decision and then accepting their verdict.

**The First Minister:** Will Mr Ross give way?

**Douglas Ross:** Is there extra time for an intervention?

**The Presiding Officer:** There is no extra time.

**Douglas Ross:** I am sorry, but I have given way twice to members on the SNP front bench.

In his motion, John Swinney claims that independence is “normal”, but a democracy in which the Government ignores the democratic vote of the people is not normal. Scotland continues to be shackled by a separatist political ideology that we did not vote for.

The Scottish people want us to move on. If that was not crystal clear to the SNP Government before the general election, it should be now. It said that it wanted to use the election as a de facto referendum. Well, the people of Scotland, once again, said no. Now is the time for us all to really move on and use the powers of the Parliament to create a better Scotland instead of blaming others and promising unicorns in an imaginary future.

Right across our country, people want change. They can see that the services that they use every

day are getting worse. Hospitals are overcrowded, schools are underperforming and our police are stretched to breaking point. They are being asked to pay more for that while getting less. People look to the Parliament for answers, but they see a chamber trapped in a time warp discussing an issue that will address none of the challenges that they face. If any members of the public are actually watching, they would be forgiven for thinking that this was a repeat and that the year was 2014, not 2024.

The SNP Government has utterly failed to move on, to commit to the new challenges and missions that need to be dealt with and to prove that it has a purpose and a reason for staying in government. Nicola Sturgeon promised that education would be her “number one priority” and that closing the attainment gap would be her Government's “defining mission”, but Scottish school performance is at record lows and the attainment gap is as wide as it has ever been. Humza Yousaf promised to eradicate child poverty, but the rate has increased since 2010. John Swinney is making the same hollow promise now, with no credible proposition to deliver it.

**The First Minister:** Will Mr Ross give way?

**Douglas Ross:** I am sorry, but I am very tight for time. If there was an opportunity for me to get more time, I would give way.

**The Presiding Officer:** Taking interventions, within members' allocated time, is a matter for members.

**Douglas Ross:** I am sorry, but I have already taken two interventions from members on the Government front bench.

As historians look back over the past 10 years, they will see them as Scotland's lost decade—years in which we divided our country and fought bitter arguments against ourselves on an issue that we had already voted on. Generations of Scots will come to see that as a national act of self-harm. They will wonder why some chose to continue to make the same arguments again and again, why the Government of the day chose to indulge in fantasy politics instead of dealing with the real issues that our country faced, and why the national interest was ignored for the SNP's nationalist interest. They will see through the empty promises and understand that, for the past 10 years, the independence debate has been a distraction and a deflection from other issues. The SNP has wheeled out its pledge election after election to avoid having to stand on its record. It is a way of blaming Westminster for all the ills that Scotland faces and, ultimately, of avoiding taking responsibility for the grave errors that the SNP has made.

Today, on the 10th anniversary of the 2014 independence referendum, my message to John Swinney and the SNP Government is this: you lost. Get over it, and let us all move on.

I move amendment S6M-14524.4, to leave out from “the Scottish Government” to end and insert:

“Scotland is a modern, diverse, dynamic nation as part of the UK, and believes that the Scottish Government should use all its powers to improve the lives of people who live in Scotland by prioritising health, education and the other devolved functions, and accept the result of the independence referendum of 18 September 2014, when Scotland voted to remain part of the UK.”

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Anas Sarwar to speak to and move amendment S6M-14524.5.

15:20

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I start by saying that the contribution that we have just heard from the First Minister, right from the start, was focused on the past. I want to focus on Scotland today and the Scotland of the future.

I have come directly from a conference on housing in Scotland—a conference that the First Minister pulled out of in order to hold this debate. On his watch, Scotland is in the midst of a housing emergency. Rough sleeping is persistent, a record number of children are in temporary accommodation, homelessness is at unacceptable levels and the dream of home ownership is unattainable for millions of Scots. Those are clear examples not of successes but of the failures of almost two decades of SNP rule. The question has to be asked: with housing fully devolved in Scotland, what exactly has the SNP Government been doing for the past 10 years, since the independence referendum?

**The First Minister:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Anas Sarwar:** I will just say this and then I will take the First Minister’s intervention. The First Minister said this morning that we need to move to a focus on what we can do rather than what we cannot do, so what has the SNP Government been doing for the past 10 years, since 2014?

**The First Minister:** What the Scottish Government has been doing since 2007 is building more affordable houses per head of population in Scotland than have been built in any other part of the United Kingdom. It is delivering 128,000 affordable homes. Perhaps Mr Sarwar would check his details and his facts before he poses the question to the Government of what issues we have attended to when—

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** What emergency?

**The First Minister:** A Labour member has shouted out to me, “What emergency?” We are focused on ensuring that we take the actions—

**The Presiding Officer:** Briefly, First Minister.

**The First Minister:** —to improve the supply of housing. That is what this Government has done, and we are proud of the record of what we have put in place.

**Anas Sarwar:** I ask the First Minister what we declared a housing emergency for. Why, in a conference of 250 housing industry leaders, did 247 of them put their hands up to say that the housing system is broken on this Government’s watch? What has it been doing for the past 10 years, since 2014?

Let us look at somewhere else where the Government has full powers—our NHS. On its watch, one in six Scots is on an NHS waiting list, accident and emergency departments are in turmoil and thousands of Scots are being forced to go private for healthcare. What has it been doing for the past 10 years, since 2014?

The SNP has full powers over education, and standards are falling in our schools. Let us not forget that it was the First Minister who tried to downgrade working-class kids during the pandemic, while he pretends that child poverty is his great number 1 mission. What has the SNP Government been doing for the past 10 years, since 2014?

It has full powers over justice, and our Scottish Prison Service is at breaking point. We have soaring court backlogs and our prisons are over capacity. What has the SNP Government been doing in the past 10 years?

When it comes to the national scandal that is drug and alcohol deaths—we have record levels of drug deaths, and alcohol deaths have gone up in the past year—what has the SNP Government been doing for the past 10 years, since the referendum?

The list of SNP failure after SNP failure goes on and on, and working Scots are paying the price for its incompetence. The truth is that the reason why we have made so little progress over the past 10 years is that the SNP Government has been leading a campaign and not a Government. It has been trying to hide its failures behind the smokescreen of the constitution.

On its watch, regardless of whether people voted yes or no, their bills are going up. Regardless of whether they voted yes or no—*[Interruption]*—they are stuck on an NHS waiting list. Regardless of whether they voted yes or no—*[Interruption]*—

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear Mr Sarwar.

**Anas Sarwar:** —education standards are falling. Regardless of whether they voted yes or no, businesses are shutting down. *[Interruption.]* Regardless of whether they voted yes or no—

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear Mr Sarwar!

**Anas Sarwar:** —opportunities for young people are being squandered. Regardless of whether they voted yes or no, they have a First Minister who would rather laugh at the people of Scotland than do the important work in Government. *[Interruption.]* It is no wonder that he wants to spend all his time focusing on the past, because he wants to ignore the here and now. *[Interruption.]*

Let us talk about the future of Scotland and what it means for the people of Scotland. *[Interruption.]* Nearly a decade—

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Sarwar, just a moment. Come on, colleagues. We can all agree that that is not appropriate. Let us hear Mr Sarwar.

**Anas Sarwar:** I know that they have had lots of doom and gloom in the past two months, but there is a constitutional debate to cheer up the SNP back benchers today. Maybe that is why John Swinney is focusing on it.

Let us look at what it means for people across Scotland. There have been nearly two decades of SNP and Tory failure. Unlike those parties, I am optimistic about Scotland's future, but hard work is required to clean up the mess that has been left behind. Because of the 17 years of this SNP Government, every single institution in Scotland is now weaker rather than stronger, and that has happened on its watch.

Scots do not want to hear hypothetical debates about powers that the Government does not have. They want to know what the Government will do with the powers that it has. The SNP used to focus on the future, but it is now firmly the party of the past—of failure, of decline, of incompetence and of being bad with our money.

It is now left to the Scottish Labour Party to lay out the positive vision for Scotland. I truly believe that there is nothing that Scotland cannot achieve if it has two Governments that are willing to work in the public interest and put people before party and campaigning. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear Mr Sarwar.

**Anas Sarwar:** That is why that important work has started, be it through GB Energy, the new deal for working people, a genuine living wage or the Scotland Office selling brand Scotland to the world. People across Scotland cannot wait for 2026, when we will have an opportunity to bring together the talents of our people, our workers and

our businesses to deliver for the people of Scotland.

Ten years ago, our opponents said that we were the ones who were negative about Scotland. Today, it is they who are negative for Scotland and Labour who are positive for Scotland. While they want to talk Scotland down and point somewhere else to blame somebody else, we are getting on with building a programme that delivers change for people right across our country.

**The Presiding Officer:** You must conclude, Mr Sarwar.

**Anas Sarwar:** I am closing, Presiding Officer.

Our country cannot wait for change. The people on the waiting lists cannot wait for change. The young person struggling to get a job cannot wait for change—

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Sarwar. You must conclude.

**Anas Sarwar:** —so bring on 2026.

I move amendment S6M-14524.5, to leave our from “with all the powers” to end and insert:

“through change in 2026, and governments focused on delivering through cooperation rather than conflict, that the needs of the people of Scotland will be fully met and their best future created.”

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Ross Greer to speak to and move amendment S6M-14524.3. You have up to six minutes, please.

15:26

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Ten years ago today, I thought that we would win. I worked for Yes Scotland and, at this point in the day, I was co-ordinating our get-out-the-vote operation. Around about now, we were making the decision to start knocking on the doors of undecided voters, because it was clear that yes voters were going to the polls without the prompting of our activists. Clearly, it was not to be, but the referendum was a life-changing experience for me, and I am grateful in particular to Shirley-Anne Somerville for giving me that opportunity.

The referendum was a life-changing experience for thousands of people across Scotland. For so many ordinary people, it was the first time that they felt genuinely politically powerful in their life. Politics was something that we were doing together as a nation, not something that was being done to the people by politicians.

On the final Saturday of the campaign, I was at the top of Buchanan Street in Glasgow—Glasgow, of course, was on track to vote yes—but it was not an organised yes campaign rally. People had simply come together in that shared sense of

excitement and hope that something transformational was possible. It felt genuinely revolutionary.

I respect and understand that being on the defensive is not pleasant. For many no campaigners, it was a very different experience. However, so much of the political and media scorn of the yes movement was elitist. It was the self-appointed middle-class and upper-middle-class gatekeepers of public opinion who did not like the fact that so many people across this country had found their voice and demanded that it should be heard and valued.

There is a lot that I could reflect on about the referendum, such as the catastrophic failure of Yes Scotland leadership compared with the outstanding success of building a yes movement in every corner of the country, and the effect of the no campaign's project fear on vulnerable people, some of whom were so terrified that they stocked up on tinned food, and others who were so offended that they turned up at their nearest yes campaign hub to volunteer.

One reflection that I want to focus on before looking to the future is the fact that, for the first time in 2014, 16 and 17-year-olds had the opportunity to vote. Before I worked for the yes campaign, I was proud to be the member of the Scottish Youth Parliament who led on that campaign. All the best debates that I took part in during the referendum were in high schools. I remember one in particular in which my opponent, the chair of the local Conservative Party, was railing about the fact that his children's cousins were English and that they would become foreigners if Scotland voted yes. One girl in the audience put her hand up and said, "Hold on a minute. What is wrong with foreigners?"

The best contributions that were made in that campaign were made by Scotland's young people. It is one of the greatest legacies of the referendum that votes at 16 was made permanent by the unanimous decision of the Parliament. All parties on both sides of the debate decided that we wanted to value the voice of young people on a permanent basis.

The past decade has only deepened my and the Scottish Greens' support for independence and our commitment to achieving it. It has been 10 years of Tory Government, Brexit, Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, and, now, there is a Labour Government but no change from those Tory policies.

Greens believe in independence for a simple reason—namely, that we think that the best decision makers for Scotland are the people who live here. Independence is a means to an end—that end being a fairer, greener country—but it is

worth it as end in and of itself, because it brings power closer to the people.

The Green amendment to today's motion speaks to our wider vision. In the UK, Westminster Governments of both parties are prepared to spend north of £200 billion on renewing their nuclear weapons arsenal. An independent Scotland can rid itself of nuclear weapons and be a force for peace and global disarmament. Both Westminster parties are committed to Brexit, despite the immense economic harm it has caused and the lost rights and opportunities.

An independent Scotland can rejoin the EU and regain those rights and opportunities. After 14 years of viciously racist Tory Government, we now have a Labour Government that is reopening detention centres for asylum seekers and boasting of mass deportations.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank Ross Greer for giving way, and I very much respect his contribution. I have always respected people who have a different perspective from my own. However, is it not fair to say that even pro-yes commentators said that the failure to present an economic plan and to be clear about the currency of an independent Scotland were the reasons why independence failed in 2014? Does the member accept that, and has that question been resolved?

**Ross Greer:** Even 10 years on, the yes campaign needs to reflect on the fact that the case that we need to make to persuade people in the future needs to improve, including on the economic answers. However, the no campaign should not avoid the fact that its argument was to stick with a status quo in which one in four children in Scotland lived in poverty, largely as a result of the policies of successive UK Governments—both Labour and Conservative.

On my point about asylum seekers, independence would give us the opportunity to treat asylum seekers with dignity and to recognise the huge privilege of being a country that can offer people safety and sanctuary.

In the UK, the richest 50 families own more wealth than half of the population—34 million people. An independent Scotland can fairly tax the unbelievable wealth that is hoarded by a tiny number of people, fund climate action, end child poverty and deliver good-quality public services. Independence offers us the opportunity to ask fundamental questions about our constitution. Do we want to continue with the unelected privilege of monarchy or become a modern democratic republic in which the people choose their national leaders?

The Scottish Greens believe that this is not as good as it gets for Scotland. We can be a fairer, greener nation, with the powers of a normal

independent country. The challenge for our movement—the independence movement—is to sell the why of independence, not the how and the process.

The challenge for our opponents is a simpler one, which is to be honest about the fact that they are denying the people of Scotland their democratic wishes through successive elections—or to be clear about how they believe that we can collectively exercise our right to self-determination.

It is useful to look back, but, today, it is more important to look forward, and I look forward to the day that this country puts its future in its own hands, which the Scottish Parliament will vote for this afternoon.

I move amendment S6M-14524.3, to insert at end

“, for example, by establishing a constitutional convention to allow the people of Scotland to decide matters such as whether they wish to retain the monarchy or adopt an elected head of state, by becoming a voice for peace and rejecting nuclear weapons, by re-joining the EU, by treating asylum seekers with humanity, and by committing to fairly tax wealth and rejecting ‘trickle-down’ economics to invest in a rapid and just transition to net zero.”

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Alex Cole-Hamilton to speak to and move amendment S6M-14524.2. You have up to six minutes.

15:33

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I remember my early days as an MSP in this chamber when speeches, debates and events such as this would, in effect, be big marquee events. The chamber would be full, the Government benches would certainly be full, the public gallery would be full and, yes, the columnists, scribblers and broadcast journalists would be packing out the press gallery. Not even the hard-bitten columnists from *The National* are here today, such is the level of deep freeze to which this issue has been plunged. That is evidence of the end to our rhetorical wars of independence, and I am glad of it, because there are better things that we can be doing with our time in this chamber.

Winston Churchill once said that the definition of a fanatic is someone who cannot change their mind and is unwilling to change the subject. In the tenor of the debate from members on the Government and Green benches today, we see the measure of the fanaticism in those parties. I wish that they would change the subject, because there are so many topics that are crying out for this Parliament’s attention and for parliamentary time, which is a rare thing.

I wish that the Government would make time available for things such as the crisis in accessing primary care and general practitioner appointments at the first time of asking; the lack of dentists who provide NHS care in our constituencies; the sewage flowing into our rivers from the Government-owned water company; the mental health crisis, which sees young people with suspected attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder on a waiting list for seven years; the missed climate targets; the drug death emergencies; and the 170,000 Scots currently battling long Covid. Presiding Officer, you will remember that the Government made twice as much money available for a referendum on the topic that we are debating today, which did not happen, than for all the sufferers of long Covid in this country—it is a national outrage.

That is how Liberal Democrats would choose to influence Government time. There is every sign and indication that, if we are going to be part of what is next, we will have more influence. I am glad of that.

The SNP has spent the past 10 years picking at the scab of its defeat. It colours everything that we do in this place. Warning lights are blinking across the dashboard of public policy, crying out for ministerial attention, which is going wanting.

It explains why there are now eight times as many Liberals on the green benches of the House of Commons in Westminster as there are within touching distance of the number of Scottish Nationalist Party MPs returned to Westminster. I came back from Brighton yesterday, where a buoyant conference took place with 72 new Lib Dem MPs, who were focused on the people’s priorities. That is what we should be discussing in this place.

I go back to the general election, because that was an important line in the sand. For the first time in a while, the SNP was humbled; it could no longer defy the laws of political gravity. The general election was far from being the de facto referendum that the SNP had initially set out to make it. The people rendered their judgment: they were not interested in having that discussion.

The polls—any given poll that you look at, Presiding Officer, from this week, last week or any week in the past 10 years—show that the public that we represent is, largely, evenly divided, or as divided as it was on the topic of independence as it was in 2014. However, the salience has fallen away to almost nothing. If we ask people what motivates their vote, they will tell us that it is about health, the cost of living, heating their home or the standard of their children’s education, which has fallen under this Government. Those matters take far greater priority. It is a bit like saying, “Do you



believe in God?" Everyone has a view about that, but it does not motivate how one votes, nor does the constitution.

Thank goodness that this 10-year anniversary will bookend a topic that has stifled our democracy and under which every election up until the most recent general election has been wrapped in a flag based on a reductive calculation of whether it is the best way to have a referendum or the only means of stopping one. I am glad of that.

We will hear a lot about Brexit. We have already heard a lot about it, but the SNP was a late convert to the cause of European unity. In fact, the SNP spent more on losing the Shetland by-election to the Liberal Democrats in 2019 than it did on the entirety of the remain campaign.

**The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan)** *rose—*

**Ross Greer:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I will make some progress, and I will come back to you later—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear Mr Cole-Hamilton.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Remain voters will find it out.

From the recent history of that divisive referendum, we know what happens when people are offered a proposition in the blind. We were told the sum total of the Brexit campaign on the back end of a bus, and the white paper did not have a great deal more to it. When that meets the reality and connects with real life—

**Alasdair Allan:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I will take an intervention from Alasdair Allan.

**Alasdair Allan:** Can the member clarify whether, any time soon when in Government, the Lib Dems are planning to rejoin the European Union?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** We are not in Government right now, but we certainly have a clearer road map back towards European integration than the SNP does. Remain voters know that, and the SNP knows that trying to join the European Union as an independent country would take years—and “austerity on stilts”. Those are not my words—it was the SNP’s economic growth commission that pointed that out. When we have that reality, as we did with Brexit, there are sacrifices and barriers. Remainers understand that, too.

For too long, we have talked about independence while matters of great importance to the people in this country idle. Lib Dems believe in togetherness, internationalism and Scotland’s place in a reformed and federal United Kingdom. I am glad that, 10 years ago, we voted to remain in this family of nations.

Let this afternoon be the very last time that we, in this chamber, indulge the failing Government in its obsession and fanaticism.

I move amendment S6M-14524.2, to leave out from “, and further agrees” to end and insert:

“by focusing on what really matters to the people of Scotland, including fixing the NHS to ensure fast access to treatment, GPs, dentists and world-class mental health services, lifting up Scottish education, delivering a fair deal for carers, stopping sewage being dumped in rivers and growing Scotland’s economy.”

15:39

**Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba):** It is 10 years since the momentous day when real power shifted to the people of Scotland. On 18 September 2014, for 15 hours, Scotland’s future was truly in Scotland’s hands. That event energised Scotland, but, since the polls closed and the results fell short, what has happened to the energy that brought 84 per cent of Scotland out to vote?

Since then, we have had four UK general elections, one of which even sent 56 SNP MPs to settle up. We have had two Scottish Parliament and two Scottish council elections, a European election, an EU referendum and countless by-elections. We have endured six UK Prime Ministers, four Scottish First Ministers and 11 leaders of the Scottish Labour Party.

Time really has passed, because one of the two ferries that was ordered in 2014 is now actually floating. We have had more SNP manifesto promises with matching mandates than you can shake a stick at, yet here we still are, wringing our hands in despair at the inevitable mismanaged decline of a UK that is trying to convince itself that it still functions. My point is that a generation has unquestionably passed.

The people of Scotland who are watching at home must be wondering what work has been done to enable us to answer some of those big questions—not just those from 2014, but those about Scotland’s future from 2024 and beyond, such as on currency, pensions, borders, immigration, the economy and so on. However, once the people gifted this Government the power, it largely forgot about independence. Aside from a brief paper exercise, independence was irrelevant to it, and running a devolved ship took its attention and became its priority. It was too focused on

playing whack-a-mole with what it would describe as the big issues of the day, and for 10 years it was nearly impossible for this Government to answer the most basic questions, such as “What is a woman?” We have now answered that question for the Government in this chamber; self-identification is not the law, and a woman is, and always will be, an adult human female.

Why has the Scottish Government been missing in action? It has declared everything to be “world leading” and has chased down magical progression points as though it is on an “I’m a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here!” bush-tucker trial rather than delivering, demanding and demonstrating that the best Scotland for the people is here—it is the one where we remove the walls of devolution and chart a new course of self-determination.

In the absence of the Government making the weather and answering the big questions of 2014, the grass-roots movement stepped up. It is time to harness that talent across Scotland and again unite to bring groups such as the Common Weal, the Scottish currency group and Believe in Scotland into the light. Only our collective effort can make a real difference.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** At the last general election, the member’s party achieved fewer than 12,000 votes across the whole of Scotland, so how much influence does she think her party really has in this debate?

**Ash Regan:** Surely, any speaker who has a seat in this Parliament is entitled to put forward their suggestion for how we should go forward, and that is what I intend to set out.

Nothing says self-determination like putting the question of independence into the hands of the British Supreme Court. That predictably British answer to the ill-fated attempt to do something without thought to the next steps disabused many trusting independence supporters of the illusion of a secret plan. I am not too sure what we expected when we had to board our British Airways flight to go down to the British non-ministerial Government department—the British Supreme Court—which sat in London and gave a judgment under a British flag, swearing an oath to a British Queen. We have heard what the British think; now it is time to listen to the people of Scotland.

I want to maintain the spirit of the referendum. It was a time when everyone came together and put our differences aside for independence. As members know, I rarely agree with the Green Party on anything, and I do not fully agree with the amendment that it has lodged, but I will support it as an addition to the toolkit for independence. The promised constitutional convention is well overdue, but the next best time for it is now. I will

also support the Government motion from the First Minister. Likewise, in the face of recurrent defeat, I have offered to support the upcoming budget on the basis of mutual support for a policy that was endorsed by the Scottish National Party conference and included in the Scottish Government’s strategic approach to prostitution. My unbuyable bill is definitely supportable.

There are three pro-independence parties in the chamber. If we start working on it today, we still have the time and the arithmetic to turn the ship around and achieve independence, because the Scottish Parliament is the voice of the Scottish people and it can play a crucial role in our journey towards independence.

I move amendment S6M-14524.1, to insert at end:

“and considers that, 10 years on from the Scottish independence referendum, the next democratic opportunity must be set, with a commitment to use the Scottish Parliament election list vote as a plebiscite for the people of Scotland to demonstrate their constitutional choice for independence.”

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

15:46

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** Ten years ago, we proposed our path to creating a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland; it was the path of independence. We were told by the better together parties that we did not need to leave Westminster, because we could change Westminster, but, within a heartbeat, Scotland’s voice was silenced and, the next day, the debate was all about English votes for English laws.

We were told at that time that our hope would lead to Scotland leaving the European Union, but it was the campaign of fear that spawned the Brexit campaign of misinformation that ripped Scotland out of Europe against our will. We were told that our hope would lead to food costs skyrocketing and energy bills going through the roof, but that is exactly what Scotland has now, with many unable to afford the cereal that we were told to eat. They said that our hope would crash the pound, destroy the economy and create a fiscal black hole, but it was not our hope that crashed the pound; it was Westminster’s Liz Truss. It was not our hope that destroyed the economy; it was Westminster austerity. It was not our hope that created the fiscal black hole; it was Westminster mismanagement.

Ten years later, Westminster has changed. Finally, after another decade of Tory misery, we have a Labour Prime Minister in number 10. After 10 weeks of Labour change, the vow is now for more austerity and that things can only get worse.

However, some things have not changed. The old Westminster politics of jobs for your mates and bungs from millionaires and billionaires is still alive and kicking.

The key to creating a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland is, quite simply, independence, and not just independence for Scotland the nation, but independence for the people of Scotland. We need an independence that is built on freedom from soul-destroying poverty and that allows people the personal independence of thinking about where they will be tomorrow rather than how they will get through today. Thinking about where we will be tomorrow opens up the idea of who we will be tomorrow. Modern Scotland must be a nation of people with personal independence that grows from the freedom of being who and what they are and from knowing where they want to go. It should be a nation of people who are comfortable with who they are, where they are going and how they are going to get there—a diverse nation, many working together as one, but not of one mindset or one identity, or having one way of doing things, and certainly not one group of people who are destined for the top because of the colour of their school tie.

The power of an independent Scotland will come from the hopes of independently minded Scots, and it is the unique perspective of each Scot that will create a modern Scotland. Such uniqueness is enriched by a diversity of thoughts, views, perspectives and backgrounds, and it is encouraged by a culture of tolerance, respect and hope. Let us be clear that we have the people, the talent, the culture, the skills, the beauty, the natural resources, the institutions and the hope. We just need our independence.

15:50

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** Ten years ago to the day, Scots were asked whether they wanted independence or whether they wanted to remain a part of the United Kingdom. They went and voted and they chose the union. You would think that, 10 years after Scotland voted decisively to remain in the UK, SNP ministers might have finally learned to move on—even if they did not want to, in their hearts, you would think that they would realise that they needed to, in their heads.

However, today's motion from the First Minister tells us everything that we need to know—that he represents a Government that is so out of touch with the majority of Scots. In the years since that vote, the push for another divisive independence vote has been continually pursued. That has been done despite so many urgent matters needing the attention and funding that were consumed by pursuing that vote.

After losing the first vote, the SNP looked forward to an independence bill, which went to the Supreme Court and was unanimously rejected by top judges. The SNP Scottish Government has spent more than £2 million on its obsession with independence, including publishing 13 papers on independence, one of which was entitled "Independence in a Modern World". Presiding Officer, I do not believe that there is anything modern or forward thinking about repeatedly reopening the divisions of an independence vote that took place exactly a decade ago. Instead, I want the Scottish Government to forgo all the wasted resources that have gone towards this and redirect them towards addressing the priorities of everyday Scots.

**Alasdair Allan:** I hear what the member is saying and I recognise and respect the fact that we come from different political stances on this, but is she saying that there is never going to be any legal way for people in Scotland to express their views again on the matter of independence, given that elections and opinion polls tend to suggest that half the country wants that?

**Annie Wells:** You lost the independence vote. You need to just deal with that and move forward. That is what we need to do in this Parliament—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Speak through the chair, please.

**Annie Wells:** We need to deal with the things that I am going to tell you that we need to deal with—the things that people are telling me that we have to deal with.

Creating a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland requires addressing the everyday issues of people across our nation. A summary of polling data from 2021 that the Scottish Government published found that, across all age groups, the economy and health are consistently ranked as the top two priorities.

On the economy, the SNP's long record in government leaves much to be desired, to put it mildly. Under the SNP's leadership, the state of the Scottish economy has cost the budget £624 million. If members do not take my word for it, they can take the opinion of Graeme Roy, who is the chair of the Scottish Fiscal Commission. Even more disappointingly, the Scottish National Investment Bank, which the SNP established, suffered pre-tax losses amounting to £14.6 million between April 2023 and March 2024, further to a £20.2 million loss the year before.

On the second priority—health—the SNP has been unable to reach its own cancer treatment target. The target is that 95 per cent of patients who are referred with suspected cancer should begin treatment within 62 days of their referral. The last time that the target was met by NHS

Scotland was in 2012, which is well before Brexit and well before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Under the SNP's leadership, NHS Scotland's waiting lists have more than doubled over the decade since 2014. At the end of June this year, there were 714,000 people on waiting lists for new out-patient appointments or for in-patient day-case appointments, as opposed to 313,000 in September 2014.

No conversation about health would be complete without talking about the SNP's most shameful legacy of all, which is the drug deaths crisis—21,965 drug and alcohol-related deaths have been recorded since 2014. Year after year, Scotland's reputation for having the western world's worst record for drug-related mortality is reaffirmed. How do affected families feel about the SNP's claims of a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland? Perhaps the Scottish Government should use the 10th anniversary of the 2014 independence vote as a decisive moment to move on.

The Scottish independence cause was put to a vote exactly 10 years ago, and Scots voted to keep their nation a part of the UK. The debate is dedicated to creating a Scotland that is fit for the future. To do so, I do not believe that fixating on the past, especially on issues that are as divisive as independence, should be the answer, nor should that be a key priority for any Government. Instead, I implore the members of the SNP Government to focus on addressing the issues that affect regular Scots and on the plethora of issues that we face every day.

15:56

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** It is always a pleasure to speak in the chamber, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak on the 10th anniversary of the Scottish independence referendum. In that referendum, the people of Scotland had the opportunity to remind the world of what a diverse and dynamic country Scotland is. However, for various reasons—a fear of the unknown, the false promises of a better future, the continual lies and scaremongering from the no camp and many sections of the media and, in some cases, a truly held belief in the benefits of being part of the UK—Scotland narrowly voted no.

No matter how you voted, nobody can argue that it has not been a tumultuous decade since that day. I doubt that anyone can honestly say that Scotland has benefited from the no vote in the referendum, despite the vehement protestations to the opposite that we have heard from members on other parties' benches. How could we seriously believe otherwise? In those 10 years, Scotland has suffered from a Brexit that we voted against; a

cost of living crisis that harms the most vulnerable in our society, deliberately inflicted through the policies of austerity; and an acceleration of the plundering of Scotland's natural resources to keep Britain afloat. Any of those factors, taken in isolation, would have been cause for putting the question to the people of Scotland again, but all of them combine to make the case for a second referendum unanswerable.

It is my continual hope but, based on what I have heard in the debate, sadly not my expectation, that UK politicians will soon embrace the concept of fairness and decency and realise that democracy is not an event but a process. All people have the right to self-determination. Opinions can change markedly in 10 years. If people do not think so, I ask them why Northern Ireland defines a political generation as seven years. If the polls in Northern Ireland showed the support for a referendum that recent Scottish polls have shown, they would have triggered a border poll. In a recent Scottish poll, 56 per cent said that they would vote in favour of independence, compared with just 32 per cent who would still vote no, if an independent Scotland were to join the EU. The real reason why unionists oppose another independence referendum is that they are terrified that they will lose, which they will, convincingly.

Despite on-going misleading claims by our opponents, the Scottish Government has done much in the 10 years since the first independence referendum to help to protect the people of Scotland from the worst of the Tory cuts from Westminster. The money that has been spent to mitigate the effect of Westminster's harsh and unfair policies, from the bedroom tax onwards, has already been well highlighted. We have spent about £1.2 billion on mitigating the impacts of 14 years of harmful UK Government policies. The Scottish Government could have spent that money on health, education or transport priorities, but it has been spent to simply stop the UK Government harming Scotland's people. Imagine how much better we could do as a country and a society if that were no longer the case.

The UK Government's decision to restrict winter fuel payments means that there has been a drop in the Scottish budget of about £160 million, while the Secretary of State for Scotland has, coincidentally, been given a budget of £150 million to spend on anti-poverty measures. In effect, the UK Government is stripping pensioners of their winter heating money to attempt to provide Ian Murray with a degree of relevance in Scottish public discourse. As has been shown by the most recent decisions by the quaintly named Labour Party, that is a drop in the ocean compared with the cuts that are to come down the line.

As has been shown already, we do things differently here in Scotland—primarily, we value our public services and our NHS. However, we are still hampered by successive UK Governments, which often act contrary to the best interests of the people of Scotland. For example, is it possible to believe for a second that, in an independent Scotland, the only oil refinery in the part of Great Britain that is by far the most oil rich would be closed? Further, while Ireland—which was once part of this benevolent union, remember—has given every pensioner €1,000 to help with their winter fuel, Labour in Westminster has scrapped the winter payment for pensioners, as prices rise here in the coldest part of the UK. In an independent Scotland, we would treat our pensioners more like Ireland does than like the UK does.

Of course, if we really want to think about creating a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland, independence is the only long-term answer. Members do not need to just take my word for how successful we would be; they can read the words of the chief executive of the Confederation of British Industry, who described Scotland's resources as

“the golden ticket for UK growth”,

which highlights that Scotland has the tools at its fingertips to be a global clean energy superpower. That is undoubtedly true, but we will not be that under the new UK Government, which is led by a Prime Minister who has clearly shown already that his focus is on style over substance. He is happy to take money off weans and pensioners while accepting huge donations from all sorts of people for all sorts of things—it really did not take him long to become prime ministerial in the fashion of his recent predecessors.

With independence, we would have a real opportunity to do things differently. We are an educated, industrious, modern nation that benefits hugely from its national resources. However, until we unlock the UK's shackles, we will never be able to show the world that Scotland is again the diverse, dynamic and driving force for good that it once was.

16:01

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Today, the SNP is using this Parliament to go through the motions and to reheat the old arguments. For all the talk of constitutional conventions and, rather bizarrely, the result of the 2026 Scottish Parliament regional list vote—in my view, that is insulting the intelligence of the people of Scotland—nobody really believes that there is any appetite now for another referendum. Yet the Government asks us this afternoon to suspend

reason and fall for the notion that a rerun referendum and, resulting from that, a victory for nationalism is the only way to win a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland. Well, the Government is entitled to its opinion, but we are entitled to ours.

I have never believed that the sky would fall in with an independent Scotland and, when people ask whether I am a nationalist or a unionist, I say that I am neither—I am a socialist. Neither have I ever believed that the real division in society is between Scotland and England. The real division is between those who, through their hard work and endeavour, create the wealth and those who end up owning the wealth. That is the real division.

The truth is this—under John Swinney and Kate Forbes's independent Scotland, there would be no redistribution of wealth and no redistribution of power. The same people would still be in charge. Jim Ratcliffe would still be in control of Grangemouth and still holding the Government to ransom—or, as we saw just last week, ignoring it completely.

Today, the First Minister tells the party faithful that he wants to concentrate on what he can do and not on what he cannot. However, his problem is that this SNP Government has been in office now for 17 years. After its 17 years in charge of land reform, what is modern, diverse and dynamic about Scotland's feudal pattern of land ownership? Half of our land is still owned by just 343 wealthy individuals, aristocrats and not-so-noble families.

What is modern, diverse and dynamic about a Scotland that denies the dignity of the migrant workers from central Asia who work on Scotland's farms, whom I met over the summer? They are exploited and are living in inhumane accommodation on Scotland's farms, today and tonight. What is modern, diverse and dynamic about that?

Just a few days ago, in the programme for government, the Government said that it wanted

“a stronger, inclusive economy”

that was

“tackling inequalities faced by women and marginalised groups ... helping people into work, and supporting diverse businesses.”

So why is it that actions taken directly by the Scottish Government—and by the NHS under the Scottish Government's direction—are threatening 60 jobs at Haven Products, a supported business in Larbert that provides useful work for people with disabilities? If this factory is not part of an “inclusive economy”, I do not know what is. I am sure that the First Minister will recall that this was a factory, back in 2015, that he himself opened.

So let this Parliament hear about the conditions that people are living in now—not independence in the abstract, but the independent living of those magnificent workers today. As part of his reawakening, I say to the First Minister, as you wake from your slumbers, step in and halt these redundancies.

Far from being modern, diverse and dynamic, under the SNP, control over the economy has been confined to investment through foreign direct investors and multinational corporations. Look at the ScotWind licensing round. Look at the private equity-owned tax avoidance scheme providers that the Scottish National Investment Bank is lending public money to.

I sincerely believe that the answers to the great challenges that we face—inequality, poverty, the extreme imbalance in the distribution of wealth and power, nuclear disarmament and the climate crisis—do not lie in nationalism or patriotism, but in a socialism that has democracy as its essence and humanity at its centre.

I say this to my own party, too. It is not just where the powers lie—it is what you intend to do with them, for what purpose and in whose interests. That is the real test of any political party that stands for change and, for me, that means how we secure not just a politics but an economy that is of the people, by the people, for the people.

16:06

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** When I have popped my head into my sons' bedrooms, I have heard accents from around the globe—from the United States and places all over Europe and Asia. They are all coming together, connected by a community that they have built online. They live in an online world that is international, inclusive and full of possibilities that reach around the globe. However, every time I hear those voices, I am reminded that my children are growing up in a smaller, more insular Brexit version of Britain, which is disconnected from the opportunities and relationships that once felt within reach. It is an international embarrassment.

That was not the future that I fought for in 2014. I was a stay-at-home mum. My daughter was older and had left home at that point, but I was still juggling the care of five neurodiverse sons and volunteering in my community. I was not a politician, but I cared deeply about what kind of Scotland my children were going to inherit.

As the independence referendum approached, I was appalled by the negativity of the no campaign, and we can see some of that reflected today. I could not understand why anyone would think that we were not capable of standing on our own two

feet. The implication that we needed outside help to succeed was an insult that stuck with me. It was not just me—it offended many others who knew that our nation's potential was far greater than the farmingtoners would have us believe.

Since then, the UK Government has built nothing but a house of cards. Meanwhile, over the past 10 years, we have seen what the SNP Government has done with our limited powers of devolution. It has built our house on a rock and laid the foundations of a better, fairer Scotland through policies such as the Scottish child payment, which is lifting thousands of children out of poverty; the protection of free university tuition; free prescriptions and personal care; and the building from scratch of a social security system that is rooted in dignity, fairness and respect.

Those were not just policies; they were acts of resilience that prepared us for the storms that were ahead and which we face now. The decision, which Scotland did not make, to pull us out of the European Union brought chaos to our economy. Tory austerity, which is now Labour's, has eroded our public services and left families struggling.

Because we built those foundations and used our devolved powers wisely, we have been able to shelter our people from the worst of it, but we can only do so much. It is Westminster's choices that have driven up the cost of living, decimated our ties with Europe and plunged Scotland into uncertainty, but let us be clear that this is not where our story ends.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** The member claims that it is decisions at Westminster that have resulted in the cost of living crisis. Does she not agree that maybe Ukraine or the pandemic had something to do with it?

**Karen Adam:** Here is the deal with this: we are told that the union is there to help and support us, and that it has broad shoulders, but where have those broad shoulders been? Slopey, more like.

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

**Karen Adam:** No, I have taken enough.

Scotland has the potential to be a global leader in renewable energy. We are generating more than 113 per cent of our electricity needs from renewable sources but, once again, the ties to the union hold us back. Instead of being rewarded, we are penalised. We pay higher transmission charges to access the UK's grid, which is an injustice that holds us back from fully capitalising on our green energy potential.

Let us not talk only about economics; we must talk about the kind of society that we want to be and about a future in which no matter someone's background, culture, or identity, they can live

freely and without fear, in which we can dismantle the barriers of ignorance that hold so many back and in which we can build a nation that is rooted in fairness and opportunity for all.

Ten years on, I am now a grandmother, and I often see the world through my posterity's eyes—the opportunities of a global community and an open, dynamic future for Scotland. More than 60 per cent of our young people support independence, because they understand that it is not just necessary but normal to control our own future. With that stat, we see that it is no longer a question of if—the Conservatives do not like to hear it—but when. Our young people are leading the way, showing us that Scotland's future lies beyond the limitations of the union. They are ready for a Scotland that is confident, outward looking and free to make its own choices on the world stage.

Scotland has the resources, the talent and the determination to succeed. The SNP Government has shown, time and again—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude.

**Karen Adam:** —that even with the limited powers that we have, we can create positive change. Imagine what we could achieve with the full powers of independence. We are not saying that we will be perfect—no country is perfect—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude.

**Karen Adam:** We are saying that we deserve to control what we do in the country in which we live, and to have a chance to flourish.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We are already running over time. Members will need to stick to their time allocations.

16:12

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** When this Parliament started 25 years ago, we had a great vision for Scotland—a Parliament where parties could work together to serve the people of Scotland and, as Richard Leonard said, to tackle the deep-seated inequalities that hold people and communities back and to build a brighter future for Scotland.

As a member who was first elected in 1999, I have seen the Parliament take great strides forward, but I have also seen it paralysed. I have seen where our constituents urgently need change but it does not happen. In a way, that is why this debate and the past 17 years have been so frustrating. The SNP Government has wasted the time and resources of Parliament to push the agenda of independence, when it was rejected by

the public in Scotland. We had a big debate, but it was also rejected 10 years later in the general election in 2024—it was not people's priority. A poll yesterday showed that even more people than a decade ago are against independence.

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

**Sarah Boyack:** No, thank you.

It is frustrating, because we are getting people talking down the powers of this Parliament, which we should be using now to support our constituents. There are things that we could do. For example, when we first established the Parliament, Labour committed to working towards a 50:50 Parliament in gender representation from day 1. There is still a lot of work to do, but I am proud that we are now the largest cohort of female MSPs yet in Holyrood. However, the issues of childcare and our kids getting education in a school that fails them came up time and again in the general election campaign. We have the privilege in here to deliver change, but we are not using it enough.

I was involved in the first two national parks, free bus travel for the over-60s in Scotland, new active travel and railway line investment. However, we are going into reverse. We are losing bus services across Scotland and the ScotRail peak fares removal pilot has been brought to an end. At a time when we need to tackle air quality and the climate emergency, that prevents people from affording or having low-carbon transport options.

Yes, the title of the debate is crucial, but we are in danger of wasting the resources in Scotland unless we get serious about what we need to do to build a diverse, dynamic country. Take our culture and the arts. We have everything from the biggest arts festival in the world to grass-roots events and organisations in neighbourhoods across the country. We can rightly celebrate that, but we could lose talent, investment and international recognition if the Scottish Government does not give clear, consistent support every year.

Nowhere is Scotland's potential more evident than in the exciting future of green energy, which Karen Adam has just mentioned. We have a talented workforce with transferable skills, but we do not have an offshore skills passport. We have fantastic opportunities with our natural resources on land and offshore, and technological innovation is driven by our higher education sector and businesses.

We have huge opportunities, but we are not getting the progress that we need, because the planning system is not efficient or properly resourced. People are having to wait not just months but years for decisions. The investment is ready, and it must not be blocked or endlessly

delayed. Take the ScotWind project. That huge resource has been removed, meaning that supply chains will not get the investment, confidence is not there and we are not getting the training opportunities that people need now. We have the skills, but we do not have the jobs.

Our newly elected Labour UK Government has started delivering, setting up GB energy, creating a national wealth fund that will deliver and making sure that we get the investment that we urgently need in our ports across Scotland.

We can do a huge amount—the NHS, education, housing and transport are all areas for which the Scottish Parliament is responsible, but they are close to breaking. Our remarkable potential as a country is being squandered.

Scottish Labour has a vision for brand Scotland—to present the very best of our country to the rest of the world and to support our economy. We can be a leader in renewables. We can be one of Europe's leading artistic hubs. We have industries that are the envy of the world and a dedicated workforce. Think about our fantastic food and drinks industry, and about our beautiful natural environment, which can fuel a tourism industry to bring benefits to local communities across the country.

We can build a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland to tackle the deepening social inequalities and our climate emergency. To do that, we need to seize the opportunity with both hands and use all the levers that are available to us. We need a Government that focuses on the day job, not on using the constitution as an excuse.

In the past few weeks, we have seen the difference that Labour is making—we have co-operative, constructive engagement between the UK and Scottish Governments, and there is respect. I agree that the Scottish Parliament should be working towards building the future, but it will take Scottish Labour to make that a reality.

16:17

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** When I first read its title, I thought that the debate would be about diversity and how it can help to create a modern and dynamic Scotland. As the first Indian woman and the first Sikh elected to the Scottish Parliament, I was excited to speak about the contributions that different ethnic minorities make to Scottish society and how they help Scotland thrive. However, when I saw the motion, I was disappointed. The SNP Government has chosen to hijack this important issue to talk about one thing and one thing only: independence. That is not a surprise.

On this day 10 years ago, Scotland overwhelmingly voted to stay in the United Kingdom. Yet, 10 years later, the SNP is unable to let go. Its obsession with the constitution means that the economy, education, health and many more important issues have taken a back seat.

I remind the SNP Government of some of its 17 years of so-called accolades—or, should I say, failures? The SNP has presided over financial mismanagement, from ferries that do not float to doomed legal battles, the most striking of which being the one on the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill.

If the SNP had its way, and if it were not for the previous UK Conservative Government, men would be able to be legally recognised as women simply by declaring it. Just a month after the vote on the bill, a convicted rapist was transferred to a women's prison, with the then First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, refusing to call him a man. Instead of learning its lesson, the SNP Government wasted more than £200,000 of taxpayers' money on legal costs to defend that doomed bill.

SNP ministers have chosen to punish hard-working Scots and businesses by making Scotland the most highly taxed part of the United Kingdom. Most people in Scotland pay higher taxes than their counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom thanks to SNP tax rises; anyone earning more than £28,850 is considered wealthy in the SNP's Scotland. That includes nurses, police officers, teachers and so on. A recent report by the Fraser of Allander Institute found that nearly two in three firms have been affected by the SNP's income tax policy, as it has made it difficult for them to attract and retain staff. At the same time, the SNP Government failed to pass on the 75 per cent rates relief for businesses that the previous Conservative UK Government provided.

An educated workforce is key to growing an economy. Unfortunately, the SNP Government has presided over cuts to further and higher education budgets while the former Deputy First Minister announced the axing of at least 1,200 university places.

**Ross Greer:** I wonder where Pam Gosal would have laid the cuts from the Conservatives' tax policy. If we had followed Conservative advice on setting Scotland's income tax rates, our public services would be worse off to the tune of £1.5 billion. Would the cuts have been made in the education sector, the health service or our courts? Where would Pam Gosal have made those cuts?

**Pam Gosal:** Maybe Ross Greer did not listen to what I said, so let us be very clear: it is about financial mismanagement. That tells you where you would get the money from. I hope that Ross



Greer will take some accountancy advice from me as someone who has run businesses and knows where money comes from and where it goes out.

Scotland's schools have suffered under 17 years of SNP Government, with the attainment gap widening, poor results in international maths, reading and science tests, and an increase in violence in schools.

Speaking of violence, the SNP Government's soft-touch approach to justice has made Scotland a more dangerous place. Police officer numbers are at their lowest since the SNP came to power, and crime has risen by 17 per cent since 2014. Despite that, the SNP chooses to release hundreds of dangerous prisoners early.

Last but not least, I will talk about health. Since the 2014 referendum, NHS waiting lists have more than doubled, while the SNP has yet to meet its cancer treatment targets. In addition to all that, Scotland remains the drug deaths capital of Europe.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude.

**Pam Gosal:** It is therefore clear that, if an independent Scotland was anything like those 17 years of the SNP Government, it would be one of incompetence and stagnation.

If the SNP is serious about creating a modern Scotland, it should stop fixating on independence and instead focus on tackling the problems that it has presided over.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude. Thank you.

16:23

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** Ahead of the referendum, the yes campaign ran an advert that began:

"Hi, my name is Kirsty and I'm going to be born on 18 September 2014—the very same day as the referendum on independence for Scotland. The question is, what kind of country will I grow up in?"

Today is Kirsty's 10th birthday, and we have a chance to look back on the country that she has grown up in. Is it a Scotland that is fairer and more prosperous? Is it a Scotland where she has been able to reach her full potential? Is it a Scotland of opportunity? Is it a Scotland where our wealth and natural resources are in our hands, harnessed to help everyone in Scotland prosper?

Let me tell you a little bit about how Kirsty is getting on. Before her first birthday, the UK elected a Tory Government that had a majority across the UK but just one single MP in Scotland. That meant that her early years were marked by austerity.

When Kirsty was one, the UK voted to leave the EU, despite a majority of voters in every Scottish local authority area voting to remain.

In the years that followed, Kirsty started school in one of the more than 1,000 schools that have been built or upgraded under the Scottish Government, and her little brother and sister were born. Kirsty was delighted when the baby boxes arrived. They meant that her siblings would get the best possible start in life—and, of course, she could help to colour them in.

Then the world changed with the pandemic. It took a wee while, but things slowly started to go back to normal, or the new normal. Kirsty went back to school, although she had to wear a mask and some of her friends had moved away due to Brexit. Her siblings started nursery, benefiting from the 1,140 hours of free childcare.

Kirsty's world changed again when her dad got ill and lost his job. It is here that we have a tale of two Governments. Kirsty's parents did not get universal credit for her younger sister because of the two-child cap. In the years that followed, the family's gas and electricity bills started to go up, followed by the cost of food and then their mortgage payments. At eight years old, Kirsty did not understand what was happening, but she knew that the house was colder and darker, that she was not getting new clothes or toys any more and that her parents always looked worried.

However, there was still some help for Kirsty and her family from the Scottish Government. Her parents received the Scottish child payment for her and both her siblings. They received best start grants when her brother and sister started school, along with school clothing grants at the start of every school year. When times were tight, they got support with bills through the home heating support fund and the Scottish welfare fund.

When Kirsty's dad got better and was able to go back to work, he was able to get a job that paid the real living wage. He now pays less income tax than he would elsewhere in the UK under Scotland's more progressive taxation system.

Kirsty and her siblings get free bus travel. They get free entry to national museums and galleries. At school, they get two hours a week of physical education and free music lessons.

At just 10 years old, Kirsty is still a child, with her whole future ahead of her. As things stand, as she gets older, she will benefit from free period products. When she turns 16, she will get to shape this country—her country—at the ballot box. If she goes to university in Scotland, she will not have to pay a penny in tuition fees.

As Kirsty grows, she will decide what she does for work and whether to have a family. She will

make her own decisions and write her own story. What will Scotland look like when we get to that point? Will we be an independent country with decisions about Scotland being made in Scotland? Will we be writing our own story and our own history?

I continue to campaign tirelessly for independence because I believe that it will give us a better Scotland for all who live here. In the decades since the referendum, the Scottish Parliament, often working across party lines, has put in place measure after measure to build a better future for the next generation, but it keeps getting undermined by Westminster austerity. I believe that we all want a fairer Scotland, a more prosperous Scotland and a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland—a Scotland where Kirsty and all our bairns can reach their full potential. The question for folk up and down our country today is simply this: do they feel that that is more likely in a nation that decides for itself? I believe that it is.

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

16:29

**Ash Regan:** In 2014, the royal family—including Will, Kate, Harry and Meghan—were in the news, the Commonwealth games were being held in Glasgow and the world was reporting on a possible Trump presidency. I am almost scared to turn around in case Bill Murray is in the gallery, rebooting “Groundhog Day”, because, 10 years later, a new generation of the royal family is in the news, the Commonwealth games are returning to Glasgow and an older, if not wiser, Donald Trump is campaigning to be the US President again. The only thing not to be repeated is a democratic event that would allow Scots to choose independence.

It is time to break out of that repeating “Groundhog Day” cycle of ask-the-British-Government-and-get-refused, and to put the question back to the people of Scotland by using what has been staring us in the face for 10 years—the ballot box. Let us hold the constitutional convention, assemble the independence commission and put democracy back in top gear in 2026 by putting the question of independence to the people on the ballot. Self-determination is the path to the beginning of our empowered future. A simple majority of pro-independence votes on the Scottish parliamentary list vote will trigger the clear instruction from the people that is needed to demonstrate that democratic authority for Scottish independence.

I cannot say that this has been a very enlightening debate, but at least we found out that Alex Cole-Hamilton is in a buoyant mood after a recent visit to Brighton. However, I caution him

that using words such as “fanatic” and “fanaticism” lets him down. There is nothing strange or unusual about believing strongly in the human right to self-determination.

If I understood Richard Leonard correctly, he said that using the 2026 list vote would be an insult to the people of Scotland. I do not agree with that, and the people of Scotland do not agree with that. Just last week, a poll showed that 57 per cent of the Scottish public think that we should have another referendum. The Labour Party and the Conservative Party must say why they are willing to prevent Scots from having their say.

That brings me on to the Greens. I do not say this often, but Ross Greer hit the nail on the head when he spoke of denying Scots’ democratic wishes. That is where we have a deep issue, because not one of the Labour, Tory or Liberal Democrat speakers addressed themselves to this fundamental question: if SNP mandate after SNP mandate did not secure a second referendum, how can Scotland express its choice? What is the democratic route that is open to Scotland? I am still waiting to hear it. Perhaps I will hear an answer to that question in the summing up from the unionist parties.

It is time to say goodbye to this non-functional union and embrace the untapped potential of an independent Scotland. We know that the union’s greatest fear is us firing on all cylinders, with the Scottish Parliament’s full powers and the backing of the Scottish people.

Column inches have been padded out in recent years by how vicious, detailed and incisive our fury with each other has been. I hope that they have seen nothing like what is about to be unleashed by the union, if we can all work together. We are a resource-rich nation and our people deserve so much better than surviving through this UK managed decline. We have in abundance the resources and the talent that we need to thrive under self-determination. No individual can change Scotland; only a collective effort will deliver the Scotland for all of us that we want to see. I urge that we all set aside our differences and work together towards a common goal—our nation’s independence.

The independence phoenix can rise from the ashes, and it will burn brighter and stronger than the fuel of our collective experience. We are taking this fight up a notch to match our rising ambition. We are discussing big ideas and bold promises. I believe that the people’s voice and their votes matter. The people of Scotland are sovereign, and only they will decide when it is time to reject Westminster’s decline and chart a new course into the safety of independence.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I encourage those who are sitting at the back of the chamber to stop their private conversations or to take them outside the chamber.

16:34

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I pay tribute to all those who were involved in the independence referendum 10 years ago. Democracy thrives through the active support of volunteer campaigners who put aside their spare time for the aid of democracy.

I pay particular tribute to the late Alistair Darling. The contribution that he made during that campaign—sacrificing years of his life for his country—is commendable. Our country is poorer for his loss. [*Applause.*]

Ross Greer, at the beginning of his contribution, rightly said that there was division in the country. Some people felt that the campaign was a joyful and positive experience. Many people thought that it was liberating. For others, it was oppressive. It was division. It meant disagreements with their family and friends. Some relationships have never been repaired as a result. However, I accept that some people were lifted up.

What I found most difficult during that campaign was the implication and sometimes being bluntly told that, because I did not support independence, I did not support my country. I am as Scottish as any nationalist in the country. I was born in Fife—in fact, I was born in Perth, but I have lived in Fife all my life. I regard myself as Scottish, and I think that everybody who chooses to live in this country should be valued in the same way. There was an implication that, because I did not support the policy that was advocated by those who supported independence, I was somehow not loyal to my country. A bit of that is coming out today, so I hope that the SNP and the nationalists reflect on that in future because, if they continue along that line of thinking, it will serve to alienate people who might otherwise be persuaded to their cause.

Sarah Boyack was bang on in talking about how some are choosing to talk down the powers of the Parliament. I am a proud member of this Parliament and I love being in this place. The opportunity that we get as members to influence the daily lives of people is fantastic. I will always look back on this time in Parliament as an opportunity and a privilege to be able to help people who are struggling with their mental health, or to get them a warm home, or to make sure that they get an education that can lift them up and help them to achieve great things in their lives.

However, I am also proud of the United Kingdom. I say that because, although all countries have their faults, the UK has done some

bloody brilliant things. Look at the fact that we founded the NHS. The international aid budget was one of the biggest in the world and has changed lives across the country. That is an immense—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Rennie, I caution you about the language that you are using.

**Willie Rennie:** Yes, Presiding Officer, but I feel passionate about the United Kingdom. We are sometimes challenged to set out a positive case for it, so that is what I am trying to do today.

The UK has the soft power to influence different parts of the world to take a different tack from the ones that they are on just now. I am proud of those people in England who stood up against the racists and the thugs who sought to exploit the attacks in Southport; they did great things, and we should all be proud of them. That is why I am proud of the UK.

I also have enough confidence to talk about reform of the UK. Although I think that it has done some great things, I also think that it needs to change, just as I think that this place needs to change. That is why I was at the forefront of advocating, through the Smith commission and the Calman commission, for more powers on tax and social security. It is not often recognised now that those significant powers and multibillion-pound budgets were transferred to this institution. I also want to change the United Kingdom. I want to change the House of Lords and the voting system, and I want to change towards a federal structure. We can believe in all those things while still believing in this institution.

None of that has ever been addressed. There has been no substantial debate about those things, so it is no surprise that there has not been any move in public opinion.

Richard Leonard, in a typically passionate speech, said that the Government was going through the motions today, and it does feel a bit like that. It had to have this debate, because it was 10 years on from the referendum, the party expects it and the activists are still yearning for independence. However, John Swinney knows that it is not a priority for the people in Scotland. He knows that, because the general election in July told him that. He knows that because he has knocked on lots of doors and people have told him that that is the case. Therefore, he knows that it is not a priority, but he is a prisoner of his party and the circumstances. I hope that we can move on from this afternoon's rather humdrum debate to something that deals with the issues that we were elected to this Parliament to deal with.

The SNP has a big question to answer—

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

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Does it carry on with debates such as this, or does it listen to the people of Scotland?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There are still too many private conversations going on around the chamber, and not just in the back row. I ask colleagues to cease and to give due respect and consideration to the person who is speaking. On this occasion, that person is Lorna Slater. You have up to six minutes, Ms Slater.

16:41

**Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** I am really very much enjoying what I feel is positive energy from the pro-independence benches—it feels a bit like getting the band back together—whereas, from the unionist benches, we are hearing nothing but misery. They are really grumpy and so negative. You would not think that they had won, would you?

Alex Cole-Hamilton, for example, mistakes enthusiasm and passion for fanaticism, he does not want to hear another thing about indy. I have bad news for him about this evening's members' business debate, when will be doing this all over again.

We had to get all the way to Willie Rennie's closing speech before we got a single unionist trying to say anything positive about the union. Everyone else has been saying how awful the current situation is, from both sides of the chamber, but Willie Rennie was the first person to try to make a positive case for the union, and that is really telling. Douglas Ross did not have a single argument in defence of the union and had nothing positive to say, and nor did Anas Sarwar. There was not a single defence of Brexit—but you guys think Brexit is great, right? Even the Liberal Democrats would tie us to Brexit, first-past-the-post voting and nuclear weapons. They are passionate that those things should stay in place.

**Willie Rennie:** I think that we know who is being negative now. Sarah Boyack made a very positive speech about the powers of this Parliament and the benefits to the United Kingdom, so I hope that the member will recognise that.

**Lorna Slater:** I thank Willie Rennie.

One of the things that I am imagining is a modern country. A challenge that Douglas Ross laid before us was to imagine Scotland as a modern country. It is very difficult for me to imagine Scotland as a modern country with a crumbling dinosaur of an institution such as the House of Lords—unelected lords, including hereditary ones—and the anachronism of a

hereditary monarchy. Modern dynamic nations have elected heads of state. Modern dynamic nations have written constitutions. Scotland cannot be that modern dynamic nation while we are chained to a UK that has an anachronistic constitutional settlement.

Anas Sarwar highlighted the housing emergency, so I look to his enthusiastic support for the Scottish Greens' policies on rent controls as those are brought to Parliament.

The Scottish Greens have a vision for an independent Scotland in which we can tax extreme wealth to fund a compassionate social security net. It would be an independent Scotland with a written constitution that set out the values of our nation—what is protected and what our rights are—so that Parliament could not be prorogued by Boris Johnson and so that those rights did not depend on the character of goodness' knows who might be elected Prime Minister. Instead, those values would be set out in writing and decided on by the people of Scotland at a constitutional convention, so that our rights and responsibilities as citizens were written into constitutional law. It would be an independent Scotland with a fully democratic elected head of state.

That is a vision that the Scottish Greens have. It is of a democratic Scotland that would rejoin the EU to reconnect with those opportunities that our young people have lost to live, love, travel and study in Europe; to undo the economic damage done to our fishers, farmers, businesses and individuals as a result of being cut off by a hard Brexit—how different the independence referendum of 2014 might have been if a hard Brexit had been on offer at the time; to get the nuclear weapons out of Scotland; and to transform our economy into a greener and fairer one, taking full advantage of the economic levers that we currently lack in order to transform that economy and taking best advantage of what is ahead of us.

I am no longer serving in the Scottish Government, but every day in that job, I found myself asking, "Well, can we do this? What about if we try that? How about if we take this forward?" In every instance, the answers were, "No, that's not devolved", "No, that's a reserved power", or "No, that will be interfered with by the internal market act." Over and over, we are limited in what we can do in Scotland by Westminster's vision and the extent of what happens there.

I see an immeasurable amount of brass neck in the chamber from people who talk about cuts and challenges in Scotland—for example, the performance of our NHS—without looking at how comparable regimes across the UK perform. We are part of this UK and, therefore, all part of the decisions that are made at Westminster. How each nation of the UK takes those decisions

forward and how things are different in Scotland is something that is worth recognising.

It is absolutely worth recognising the benefits that we get in Scotland in exchange for people who earn a bit more paying a bit more. The First Minister listed those benefits in his speech, including the baby box, free university tuition and the Scottish child payment. All of those things, which benefit people across the spectrum, mount up and build the fairer, greener country that the Scottish Greens will continue to work for.

I should say that members will be hearing from me again in a few minutes in the members' business debate.

16:46

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** The motion is entitled "Creating a modern, diverse, dynamic Scotland". As the First Minister has said, I am sure that that is something that we all want to achieve—creating a future that embraces the aspirations of Scotland's people and harnesses our collective talents.

However, it is one thing to talk about that future and another to deliver it. That requires ambition; competence; an impatience for change; a focus on the future, not the past, as Anas Sarwar rightly said when he opened; and a focus on what is happening in 2024, not on what might have been in 2014. However, the past 10 years have been a lost decade, spent largely doing exactly the latter.

The Government once again betrays its lack of ambition for Scotland in the second half of its motion. It perpetuates the myth that no good can happen until day 1 of Scottish independence and that the constitutional cul-de-sac is the only means to that end. We have heard as much from SNP, Green, and Alba members. However, there are three things that it contradicts. First, it overlooks our vast potential to thrive right now with the powers that we already have. Secondly, it disregards the wishes expressed by the people of Scotland on how to reach that ambition, both at the recent general election and 10 years ago today. Finally, the ambition for modernity, diversity and dynamism aligns entirely with the mission set by the new UK Labour Government.

**Ross Greer:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Neil Bibby:** Do I have time for an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You do not have additional time, Mr Bibby.

**Neil Bibby:** I will make some progress, Mr Greer, with the limited time that I have.

A great many Scots made the respectable and honourable decision to vote in favour of Scottish

independence. Many more—a clear majority—affirmed our place as a proud nation in the world's oldest union.

On that first point, members, including Richard Leonard and Sarah Boyack, have talked about the importance of the Parliament's and the Government's having a can-do attitude to solve the problems faced by the people of Scotland. John Swinney even said earlier that Scotland must start focusing again on the things that we can do instead of regretting what we cannot do. However, I say to the First Minister that many people will be thinking that it is not Scotland that has been the barrier to that for the past 17 years—it is the SNP Government.

**The First Minister:** Will Mr Bibby answer a specific point about the implications for Scotland of the legislative change after the Brexit referendum? I know that he was involved in many of those issues in Parliament. Does he agree that it is important that the changes that eroded the powers of the Parliament now be reversed?

**Neil Bibby:** The new UK Labour Government is clear that it wants to reset its relationship with the European Union, and we want the relationship between the Scottish Government and the UK Government to be reset. I know that UK ministers will be working to rebuild relationships with the Scottish Government and other devolved Governments across the UK.

It would be helpful if the First Minister could relay the point about having a can-do attitude to his back benchers and ministers, because the point is lost on them. The people of Scotland do not need to hear that can-do attitude on only one particular day—there needs to be a culture of leadership from the Government every day.

On the issue of co-operation, John Swinney is right that the Scottish Parliament was created 25 years ago, after Labour passed the Scotland Act 1998, and we will mark that anniversary next week. However, we want to focus on the future, not the past. If we want to take inspiration from the past, let us listen to what Sarah Boyack said about the spirit of collaboration in the early years of this Parliament. We want the powers of devolution to be used to their fullest and to have a spirit of co-operation rather than conflict in order to deliver for the people of Scotland.

The new UK Government is committed to resetting the relationship with the Scottish Government and working closely with this Parliament in the best interests of the people of Scotland. We can match that approach and unite over our ambitions to improve the lives of Scots by working together in partnership to deliver for them. One positive example of that joint working happened yesterday with the positive

announcement of the Commonwealth games coming to Glasgow in 2026.

I have also said that work needs to be done on our future relationship with the EU, and we are committed to resetting that. The Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee recently published a report on the trade and co-operation agreement, and we need to work together to resolve the challenges that it highlights.

The Tories made a complete mess of Brexit, but—and SNP members and Lorna Slater neglected to mention this—it has shown the complexities, costs and disruption that arise from breaking up a political and economic union. Frankly, leaving our biggest trading partner—the UK—would make Brexit look like a cakewalk.

Whether it is Brexit or independence, the constitutional argument exists on a spectrum—it is not binary. The question that members of this Parliament face now is this: should we wait for the constitutional settlement of one's choice to materialise for better or for worse, or should we get on with making change happen right now? This is the choice that the people of Scotland will face at the next Scottish Parliament elections in 2026: continue the constitutional debate endlessly or accept the settled will of the Scottish people and use our place in the UK to deliver on their ambitions for a better Scotland. Either we fold our arms in disappointment or we roll up our sleeves. The growing divide is between the can't-dos and the let's-dos.

John Swinney talked about the need for a reawakening. With respect, the SNP Government needs to wake up to what people in Scotland have been telling it for years. Let us not talk down this place's ability to make change—let us use the powers that we have to deliver change, because the people elect us to make their lives better. They want action on the issues that matter to them—action on helping people on the NHS waiting list, on restoring our once-leading education system, on reversing declining standards and on tackling the housing emergency.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** You must conclude, Mr Bibby.

**Neil Bibby:** They are looking for us to grow Scotland's economy. I believe that this side of the chamber—the side that is impatient to deliver a modern, dynamic and diverse Scotland now, not in some imaginary future—will win that argument. We will not hide behind an alibi of failure.

16:53

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** I join Willie Rennie in paying tribute to Alistair Darling, who

was a fine public servant. I think that members from across the chamber looked up to him.

This debate has underlined how and why the SNP Government has failed Scotland in the years since the 2014 referendum. In short, the Scottish Government did not, and still does not, respect the result of a referendum that it lost convincingly. Rather than say that enough is enough, it doubled down on division. It has held people and business in political paralysis over a lost decade—a decade in which Scotland should have been looking forward, not back over its shoulder to the divisions of the past.

John Swinney already has the powers to create a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland.

**Lorna Slater:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Craig Hoy:** I will not quite yet.

The levers to control those powers are vested in this very institution; they sit in the hands of front-bench ministers. On tax, welfare and public services, the SNP has the power to make this country more modern, more diverse and more dynamic, but John Swinney and his party have actively chosen to do the opposite. The years after the referendum could have been used to heal our nation, bury the hatchet and end the division that it created. Instead, the SNP has neglected to do the day job. It has failed to use devolution to bring our country together, and, by not doing so, it will not be able to take it forward. In short, Scotland would have been a better place—a more modern, forward-looking and prosperous place—had the SNP accepted the result of the referendum.

I will reflect on today's contributions. Pam Gosal was entirely correct—as I have always found her to be. As the first Indian woman and the first Sikh elected to Holyrood, Ms Gosal has had much to offer about diversity issues in the chamber. However, as she noted, the SNP Government chose to hijack this important conversation to talk about one thing and one thing only: independence. That was clear from the contributions from SNP back benchers. As Alex Cole-Hamilton said, however much the SNP talks about it, out there in the country, in the real world—in the pubs, bars, restaurants and shops, and on the streets of Scotland—independence is no longer the priority even of those who favour it, but we know that that is what the SNP wanted to focus on in the debate.

Kevin Stewart gave us a rhetorically excellent speech, but it was misty eyed and simplistic in its outlook of how an independent Scotland would possibly function. Ross Greer informed us that, as a much younger man, he was dispatched by the organisers of the yes movement to go out and talk to undecided voters. I thank the organiser who deployed him for that tactic. Ash Regan mentioned

the weather, but she did not mention her independence barometer. Even she would agree that, under the SNP Government, independence is stone-cold dead.

There are serious issues at the heart of today's debate because the Government failed to recognise a once-in-a-generation referendum. That was a failure of national leadership, but the failures did not stop there. There was then a failure to grow the Scottish economy; the Scottish budget would be £624 million higher this year if Scottish economic performance had matched that of the rest of the UK. Only last year, there was a failure to ensure that the Scottish National Investment Bank—which was once the flagship of the SNP's investment agenda—functioned properly. It lost £14.6 million last year. There was a failure to pass on business rates relief in the budget, which is doing untold damage to Scottish hospitality and retail. There has been a failure on tax, with most Scots now paying higher taxes compared with those in the rest of the UK. The SNP has also failed to tackle waste, with £2.7 billion of taxpayers' money being squandered over the course of the Parliamentary session. It has singularly failed local government, with councils' debt soaring to one and a half times their annual budget.

Annie Wells noted the SNP's failure on health. It has failed to meet its cancer treatment target each and every year since 2014. It has failed to tackle drug addiction, which is now Scotland's national shame, with nearly 22,000 drug and alcohol deaths since 2014. It has failed to tackle long waits in Scotland's NHS, where waiting lists have more than doubled since the 2014 independence referendum.

The SNP has also failed on education, which was meant to be its number 1 priority. It oversaw the worst-ever international results in reading, maths and science. Levels of violence and disruptive behaviour in schools have skyrocketed. Despite Nicola Sturgeon's promise, the SNP has failed to close the attainment gap. John Swinney's recent programme for government rows back on that commitment.

The charge sheet continues. The SNP has failed in its plans to launch a national energy company. It has repeatedly failed Scotland's oil and gas industry, which supports 93,000 jobs. It has failed on its very own climate targets, after missing them for nine years out of 13. It has failed on ferries, with two vessels now seven years late—and counting—and £300 million over budget. It has failed rural drivers by failing to dual the A9 and the A96, which has resulted in far too many avoidable deaths.

The list goes on and on. The SNP has failed to meet its tree-planting targets in five of the past six

years. It has failed on its manifesto commitment to invest £25 million in rural housing. It has failed on its promise to install superfast broadband across rural Scotland by 2021. Let us look at the waste: £2 million of taxpayers' money was spent on civil servants working with Angus Robertson on independence, and more than £200,000 was spent on 13 independence white papers that nobody is reading. Meanwhile, the percentage of children living in poverty has remained the same in Scotland since 2007, and the SNP has failed to hit the target of transferring all benefits to Scotland by 2020.

Let us look at the police. Police numbers are at their lowest level since the SNP came to power.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** Theresa May is on the record as warning, back in 2013, that Scotland would be denied access to the UK's most sophisticated and secret intelligence and counterterrorism tools if we became independent—in other words, we would be less safe. Can the member explain how Brexit has changed that, given that our European neighbours are our closest allies in this space?

**The Presiding Officer:** In conclusion, Mr Hoy.

**Craig Hoy:** What is not keeping Scots safe is having the lowest police numbers since 2014 and a rise in crime since 2014. Ultimately, this Government has failed that test. It has also failed the transparency test. The SNP's headquarters have been raided by Police Scotland—

**The Presiding Officer:** Conclude, Mr Hoy.

**Craig Hoy:** Nicola Sturgeon misled Parliament during the Salmond scandal. Ultimately, the First Minister is following in the failed footsteps of his predecessors by failing to respect the result of the referendum and failing to use the powers of this Parliament to full and good effect. In short, on each and every single day of the past decade—

**The Presiding Officer:** Conclude, Mr Hoy.

**Craig Hoy:** —the SNP has put its own interests first and the Scottish national interest second.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Hoy. I call Kate Forbes to wind up the debate.

17:00

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):** I certainly cannot believe that it has been 10 years since the independence referendum—a day that many, many people spent years hoping and campaigning for. Regardless of the side that people were on, it was a victory for democracy—discussing and deciding Scotland's future in a peaceful, largely respectful and thoughtful way. That is surely a success for us all.

Today's debate has revealed some other successes—the freedom that we still enjoy to debate freely, to hold very different views and to represent every community in Scotland. I agree with Ash Regan about tempering our language to restore respect to the constitutional debate; I also agree with Willie Rennie that that extends to respecting that people can be patriotic and proud while taking different positions on the constitution.

In the spirit of disagreeing well, I will highlight a few comments that have been made. Douglas Ross said that independence would not solve any of the issues that he highlighted as priorities. Foremost among those that he mentioned was the rise of poverty. I assume that that is the same poverty that has been exacerbated by his party dismantling the benefits system, baking indignity and inhumanity into it. Only when devolved has that system actually become fairer.

**Douglas Ross:** I ask the member the same question that I asked the First Minister. If those powers are so important to this Parliament, why, then, has her Government returned them to the UK Parliament?

**Kate Forbes:** My question in response to Douglas Ross would be, what powers is he talking about? We have worked hard to devolve and transform powers, and the experience for so many people across the country has been dramatically different.

The poverty that Douglas Ross spoke about is the same poverty that catastrophically worsened under a Conservative Prime Minister who crashed the economy, sent interest rates rocketing and earned the mockery of the international community. All that was delivered by a party that had not won an election in Scotland since the 1950s, so there can be no suggestion that Scots ever voted for that. I would have far more trust in the people of Scotland making intelligent, compassionate and wise choices than I ever would have had in successive UK Prime Ministers.

That brings me to Anas Sarwar, who claimed that bills going up during the SNP's tenure was a strong argument against independence. That makes me wonder what it means for the union as energy bills have spiralled after only two months of Labour rule. Two months is all we have had, but Scots will be poorer and colder for it. Labour promised to cut energy bills by £300, yet bills have gone up by £149. That would be a problem in and of itself, but this is an energy-rich country. We hear time and again that Scotland has the resources and the assets for the just transition—that we will lead when it comes to Labour's energy future—and yet Scots are paying more.

Labour's new campaign for the union is that things can only get worse. Vote Labour to get

colder and poorer; vote no for a depressing, unequal austerity-laced future. What a vision.

As Kevin Stewart said, all the threats that those in favour of the union put to us in 2014 did actually come true—we had prophets amongst us—but they came true because we voted no. We are out of the EU because we voted no, and Scotland's vote was irrelevant, and we have seen successive UK Governments mismanage the economy, leaving us wrestling with higher, more stubborn inflation and spiralling costs. However, we need to look to the future, and I want to end on a point of consensus.

As the First Minister said, we are all in politics because we want to be agents of change. We believe that the world is not as fair, prosperous or just as it should be, and we want to fix that. We will do that by listening to the people. We are accountable to them; we owe it to them to represent their views and their experiences, as diverse as they are—and nowhere more so than on the constitution—and we will do that through collaboration. It is no small thing that those on both sides of the constitutional debate can still discuss their views freely and openly.

Our vision is to break the cycle of poverty so that there is equality of opportunity for every child, irrespective of where they are born or who they are; to foster aspiration and entrepreneurship; to unlock creativity; to solve the biggest societal challenges of our day in healthcare, transport and the transition to net zero; and to share prosperity so that every family, household and person in Scotland can make ends meet and thrive. I hope that we all believe that Scotland is wealthy enough, talented enough, and more than enough. It is up to us to either stymie that or to foster it. I remain ever hopeful that the future will be much better than the present.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on creating a modern, diverse, dynamic Scotland. It is time to move on to the next item of business—

**Keith Brown:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I rise to raise a concern about some information that has been put in the *Official Report* today that might not be accurate—in particular, a statement from Pam Gosal. I do not have her exact words, but she said something to the effect that people in the UK pay less tax than people in Scotland. In addressing that, I am not just talking about tuition fees being free in Scotland, or prescription charges, or the council tax reduction that was mentioned by the First Minister, or the baby box, or the Scottish child payment, or even, in fact—

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Brown, if I may interrupt. I know that, as a long-serving member,



you will be aware that a point of order is intended to question whether or not proper procedures have been followed or are being followed. I would be grateful for the point of order.

**Keith Brown:** Am I able to conclude my point of order, Presiding Officer?

**The Presiding Officer:** Yes.

**Keith Brown:** I was not referring to the fact that, in Scotland, we pay between £400 and £500 less in council tax. I was not even referring to the fact that the UK Government has created the largest tax burden since the second world war. I was referring to the fact that the official statistics show that the majority of people in Scotland pay less income tax than they do in the rest of the UK. If Pam Gosal genuinely spoke in error, surely it would be appropriate for her to stand up and correct the *Official Report*.

**The Presiding Officer:** I say to all members that questions regarding the accuracy of members' contributions are not points of order. The content of members' contributions are matters for the member. All members will be aware that there is a mechanism available through which any corrections can be made.

## Business Motion

17:09

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-14534, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 24 September 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Health and Social Care Winter Preparedness Plan 2024-25

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: The UK Budget – Scotland's Priorities

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 25 September 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Deputy First Minister Responsibilities,  
Economy and Gaelic;  
Finance and Local Government

*followed by* Education, Children and Young People  
Committee Debate: Additional Support  
for Learning

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 26 September 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:  
Net Zero and Energy, and Transport

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Scotland  
Stands with Ukraine

*followed by* Business Motions

<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
Tuesday 1 October 2024	
2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Topical Questions (if selected)
<i>followed by</i>	Stage 3 Proceedings: Aggregates Tax and Devolved Taxes Administration (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Committee Announcements
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Wednesday 2 October 2024	
2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; Health and Social Care
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Labour Party Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Approval of SSIs (if required)
5.10 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Thursday 3 October 2024	
11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Social Justice
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 23 September 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.—[*Jamie Hepburn*].

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Douglas Ross to speak to and move amendment S6M-14534.1.

17:10

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** It was exactly one week ago today that two

Scottish Conservative motions brought before this Parliament were passed by a majority of members. They dealt with two serious, important and topical issues—peak rail fares and the delivery of free school meals for all primary school pupils across Scotland in the course of this parliamentary session. The votes on those motions were successful, but a week has passed and we have heard nothing from the Scottish Government about how it intends to obey the will of Parliament.

At this point, may I invite the First Minister to address Parliament and indicate, as I am sure he will, that he intends to obey the will of Parliament?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** If Mr Ross wishes me to talk about the will of Parliament, what about Mr Ross obeying the will of a Parliament that has voted for there to be an independence referendum so that people can decide? What does he think about that?

**Douglas Ross:** Is it not telling but also sad that the First Minister speaks about independence and separating Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom when the discussion is about free school meals for all primary school pupils across Scotland?

In the question that I asked the First Minister—"may I invite the First Minister to address Parliament and indicate, as I am sure he will, that he intends to obey the will of Parliament?"—

I did not use my words. Those are John Swinney's words. That is what John Swinney said when he was sitting on the Opposition benches in 2001 and the then Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive had been defeated, resulting in a motion being passed against its will. John Swinney was the first one up on his feet asking for a statement from the then First Minister about how he would obey the will of Parliament. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear Mr Ross.

**Douglas Ross:** If the First Minister wants to hear more of his words, I can say that he went on to say this:

"Ministers seem desperate to make statements when it suits them, but not when they have problems in Parliament. Will the First Minister give a commitment ... to make a statement to Parliament ... to clarify the Government's stance on the amended motion to which Parliament agreed?"—[*Official Report*, 8 March 2001; c 427.]

I could not agree more with what John Swinney said when he was in opposition. Why is John Swinney now not so keen to respect the will of Parliament and come forward to make a statement on these issues?

I know that this is not an important issue for some MSPs—George Adam described the debate about free school meals as extremely tedious.

**Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):** You are tedious.

**The Presiding Officer:** Members, can I ask that we conduct ourselves in a courteous and orderly manner?

**Douglas Ross:** I do not think that it is extremely tedious. I think that it is extremely important that we have an opportunity to hear from the First Minister or his cabinet secretaries about the two proposals, which they previously supported and no longer do. John Swinney was the Deputy First Minister and education secretary who put the commitment for free school meals for every primary school pupil into the Scottish National Party manifesto. He asked for support to elect his MSPs on that basis. Now, Parliament has asked his Government to come forward with its plans to obey the will of Parliament, which he was previously keen on. I think that it is right that we now look at that.

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):** I recognise the member's enthusiasm for these policies. Will he, therefore, bring forward amendments to the Scottish Government's budget to ensure that they progress? [*Applause.*]

**Douglas Ross:** I am very keen on these policies, and I note that people are applauding the idea that the SNP might actually do what it said that it would do.

My colleagues have already engaged in conversation about this—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear one another.

**Douglas Ross:** —but we would be able to hear more about it and be able to have a discussion if the Government simply made time to enable us to do so.

I have been very clear in my amendment to the business motion. I am not asking for anything to be removed; I am asking for 30 minutes to be added next week—just half an hour—to hear more about John Swinney's previous commitment to free school meals and to hear more about the SNP's previous promise to cap peak rail fares.

I hope that the Minister for Parliamentary Business will listen to the will of Parliament, given that parties across the chamber have come together to vote for these two policies to be enacted, and will give us an opportunity to hear from ministers how they will either obey the will of Parliament or tell us why they cannot and will not. Parents of schoolchildren and travellers across Scotland want to know what the Scottish Government will do after the Opposition parties united to tell it that these two issues are of crucial importance.

We need to hear from a minister and, by approving the amendment that I have lodged today, that can happen next week.

I move amendment S6M-14534.1, to leave out

“2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Net Zero and Energy, and Transport”

and insert

“2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Net Zero and Energy, and Transport

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Delivering on the Votes of the Parliament on 11 September 2024 to Provide Free School Meals to All Primary School Children in the Current Parliamentary Session and to End Peak Rail Fares”.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Jamie Hepburn to respond on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

17:14

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Jamie Hepburn):** With regard to the amendment that is before us, I must make it clear that, following last week's debates on these matters, there is nothing new for ministers to set out to Parliament.

**Douglas Ross:** Surely something new is that the will of Parliament has been very clearly articulated in a vote that had support from members of the Scottish Conservative Party, the Scottish Labour Party, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Scottish Greens and Alba. The difference is that Parliament has now said that the policies should be enacted, so we should at least hear a response from ministers.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Members can bring these matters up across a range of opportunities.

I will return, momentarily, to the subject matter. As was made clear to Parliament last week, although the Scottish Government remains committed to our free school meals programme, we are unable to roll out universal provision to primary 6 and 7 at the current time, due to the financial position. The Scottish Government continues to advocate for an end to Westminster austerity, which the new UK Government has continued. As was also made clear last week, should the financial situation allow, we will look to take universal provision forward in this parliamentary session.

The next stage of the free school meals programme, which has always been an iterative process, is to deliver meals for those who are in receipt of Scottish child payment in primary 6 and

7. I reaffirm that that stage is fully funded and will be delivered in this parliamentary session.

The ScotRail peak fares removal pilot was a temporary arrangement, which was announced as part of the 2023-24 budget. The pilot was initially intended to run for six months, and the Government extended it for a further six months—for a total duration of 12 months. It was not, as has been suggested by some, a Scottish Government manifesto commitment. In light of the financial challenges that we face and the level of additional and continuing subsidy that is required to continue the pilot—against its contribution to tackling climate change, with modal shift from car, and tackling child poverty, which are key Scottish Government policies—we have been unable to continue the pilot beyond 27 September.

However, as the Cabinet Secretary for Transport made clear last week, a 12-month discount on all ScotRail season tickets has been introduced, and the flexipass terms have been amended in order to create the equivalent of a 20 per cent discount. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport is already undertaking action to send members relevant information about those changes in order to encourage take-up.

The Scottish Government has confirmed that, should UK budget allocations to the Scottish Government improve in future years, we would be open to considering future subsidy to remove peak fares.

With regard to the amendment, as I have already made clear, there is always the opportunity for members to question ministers on these matters in the normal way, such as question times, including First Minister's questions. We will shortly have a Scottish budget to agree, at which point all parties will be able to suggest their priorities and, crucially, set out how they should be paid for.

In response to requests from the Greens and the Finance and Public Administration Committee, I confirm my intention to bring forward a proposal to the Parliamentary Bureau for us to debate issues on the long-term sustainability of Scotland's public finances. Because there are only three weeks until the October recess, and stage 1 and 3 debates, committee debates and Opposition debates are already scheduled in that time, the earliest that I can bring the proposal forward is immediately after recess. On our return from recess, I am happy to schedule that business as quickly as possible and provide Parliament with the opportunity to debate that important issue.

Given that we have just had parliamentary debates on both of the policy topics that we are talking about, and that our position on those matters has not changed since then, there is

nothing for the Scottish Government to add via a ministerial statement at this time.

**The Presiding Officer:** The first question is, that amendment S6M-14534.1, in the name of Douglas Ross, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14534, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

17:18

*Meeting suspended.*

17:20

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to the vote on amendment S6M-14534.1, in the name of Douglas Ross, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14534, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

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

**For**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-14534.1, in the name of Douglas Ross, is: For 57, Against 69, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-14534, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 24 September 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Health and Social Care Winter Preparedness Plan 2024-25

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: The UK Budget – Scotland's Priorities

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 25 September 2024		5.10 pm	Decision Time
2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions	<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic; Finance and Local Government	Thursday 3 October 2024	
		11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
		11.40 am	General Questions
<i>followed by</i>	Education, Children and Young People Committee Debate: Additional Support for Learning	12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
		<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions	2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions	2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Social Justice
<i>followed by</i>	Approval of SSIs (if required)	<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
5.00 pm	Decision Time	<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Thursday 26 September 2024		5.00 pm	Decision Time
11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions	(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 23 September 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.	
11.40 am	General Questions		
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions		
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business		
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions		
2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Net Zero and Energy, and Transport		
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Debate: Scotland Stands with Ukraine		
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions		
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions		
5.00 pm	Decision Time		
Tuesday 1 October 2024			
2.00 pm	Time for Reflection		
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions		
<i>followed by</i>	Topical Questions (if selected)		
<i>followed by</i>	Stage 3 Proceedings: Aggregates Tax and Devolved Taxes Administration (Scotland) Bill		
<i>followed by</i>	Committee Announcements		
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions		
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions		
5.00 pm	Decision Time		
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business		
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business		
Wednesday 2 October 2024			
2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions		
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; Health and Social Care		
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Labour Party Business		
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions		
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions		
<i>followed by</i>	Approval of SSIs (if required)		

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:23

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-14535, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and S6M-14536, on substitution on committees.

### *Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Companies Act 2006 (Scottish public sector companies to be audited by the Auditor General for Scotland) Order 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Jackie Dunbar be appointed to replace Stuart McMillan as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Stuart McMillan be appointed to replace Jackie Dunbar as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Criminal Justice Committee;

Christine Grahame be appointed to replace Karen Adam as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, and

Gordon MacDonald be appointed to replace James Dornan as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

## Decision Time

17:23

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Douglas Ross is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Anas Sarwar, Ross Greer, Alex Cole-Hamilton and Ash Regan will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-14524.4, in the name of Douglas Ross, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14524, in the name of John Swinney, on creating a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is closed.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no.

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

I see that Ms Duncan-Glancy wants to speak. I can confirm that your vote has been recorded.

### **For**

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

Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-14524.4, in the name of Douglas Ross, is: For 30, Against 96, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Anas Sarwar is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Ross Greer will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-14524.5, in the name of Anas Sarwar, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14524, in the name of John Swinney, on creating a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is closed.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

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

**For**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)



Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dorman, 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) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-14524.5, in the name of Anas Sarwar, is: For 56, Against 70, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-14524.3, in the name of Ross Greer, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14524, in the name of John Swinney, on creating a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

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

Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**Against**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysoyl (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 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)  
 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)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-14524.3, in the name of Ross Greer, is: For 70, Against 56, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-14524.2, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14524, in the name of John Swinney, on creating a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland, 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)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)  
 (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-14524.2, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, is: For 56, Against 70, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-14524.1, in the name of Ash Regan, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14524, in the name of John Swinney, on creating a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is closed.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Despite having a trio of helpers behind me, I was not able to get reconnected. I would have voted no.

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

**For**

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, 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)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)

Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [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)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-14524.1, in the name of Ash Regan, is: For 1, Against 125, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-14524, in the name of John Swinney, on creating a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is closed.

**Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. There seems to be an issue in this part of the chamber. I would have been delighted to have voted yes.

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

#### For

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

Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Cryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 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)  
 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)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-14524, in the name of John Swinney, on creating a modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland, as amended, is: For 68, Against 56, Abstentions 0.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Government should use all its powers to build a modern, diverse, dynamic nation, and further agrees that it is only with all the powers of a normal independent nation that Scotland would truly be enabled to take its own decisions to fully meet the needs of the people of Scotland and create their best future, for example, by establishing a constitutional convention to allow the people of Scotland to decide matters such as whether they wish to retain the monarchy or adopt an elected head of state, by becoming a voice for peace and rejecting nuclear weapons, by re-joining the EU, by treating asylum seekers with humanity, and by committing to fairly tax wealth and rejecting ‘trickle-down’ economics to invest in a rapid and just transition to net zero.

**The Presiding Officer:** I propose to ask a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions.

As no member has objected, the question is, that motion S6M-14535, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S6M-14536, on substitution on committees, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Companies Act 2006 (Scottish public sector companies to be audited by the Auditor General for Scotland) Order 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Jackie Dunbar be appointed to replace Stuart McMillan as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Stuart McMillan be appointed to replace Jackie Dunbar as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Criminal Justice Committee;

Christine Grahame be appointed to replace Karen Adam as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, and

Gordon MacDonald be appointed to replace James Dornan as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.

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

## Independence Referendum (10th Anniversary)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-14344, in the name of Lorna Slater, on its being 10 years since Scotland's independence referendum. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that 18 September 2024 marks 10 years since the referendum on Scottish independence; recognises what it considers to be the historic level of democratic engagement during the campaign, which, it understands, resulted in the highest voter turnout since universal suffrage; understands that support for Scottish independence has consistently polled at 45% to 50% of Scotland's population in the decade since; considers that the Scottish Parliament has been undermined in recent years by the UK Government, including through Brexit, the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, and the use of an order under section 35 of the Scotland Act 1998; welcomes the commitments made by both the Scottish Government and the recently elected UK Government to reset the relationship between the two governments, but considers that it remains unclear whether either government has set out what would constitute such a reset, and notes the belief that the Parliament and the people of Scotland, including those in the Lothian region, must have the opportunity to shape any improved relationship, including by establishing how the people of Scotland could progress a legal route to independence if that is their wish.

17:37

**Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** I woke up today feeling cheerful, even though it is not the anniversary of Scotland's independence day. I have very fond memories of the run-up to indyref 2014. Everywhere that I went—to work, to the gym, walking down the street—people were talking about first-past-the-post voting systems; the unelected House of Lords; the powers, or lack thereof, under devolution; and whether Scotland should be home to nuclear weapons. People were energised and interested in politics—that was the moment when we had the power to shape our future.

I was not a campaigner for indy; I was not involved in politics in any way at the time. I was working in Orkney on a wave energy machine, and I travelled back to my home in Edinburgh to cast my vote for yes. The next morning, when the announcement was made that the no vote had won, I had a terrible sinking feeling in my stomach—the feeling of an opportunity lost, and a moment for a better future missed.

Over the next two weeks, that feeling galvanised me to the point at which I sat at my computer and googled "Green party"; I found the Scottish Greens and paid my £3 to join. The interesting thing was

that I was not the only person who did so. The membership of the Scottish Greens quadrupled in that week: thousands of people joined up, inspired by the dream of a different future—the dream of an independent Scotland.

The unionist parties in the chamber keep hoping that the question of independence will just go away. Instead, support for independence is strong. I understand that, before the referendum was called, support was at about 27 per cent. The campaign for indy drove that support up to 45 per cent on voting day—a huge achievement, in which Green yes played a significant part. Support kept growing, and today, it sits at around 50 per cent. We know that young people overwhelmingly support an independent Scotland, so it looks like it will continue to grow.

The independence campaign inspired us because it gave us the chance to imagine something better, and to engage with the big questions of how we build a society that is based on fairness, equality and respect; how we redistribute wealth so that everyone has enough to live a dignified life; and how we play our role on the global stage to foster peace and good global citizenship. The Scottish Greens have long supported independence because of the opportunity that it gives us to build a fairer, greener and more equal Scotland.

There is a mystery here. Before 2014, when support for independence was much lower than it is today, the Westminster Government deigned to grant us a referendum. Now, with support so much higher, and with Scotland having returned a pro-independence majority to Holyrood and Westminster time after time, the Westminster Government forbids a referendum. Not only that, but it refuses to set out the conditions under which it would allow that democratic expression of the will of the Scottish people to take place. Why are those in Government at Westminster so adamant? It is a great mystery. Could it be because they know that they would lose?

We were promised the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world, but in reality, in the past 10 years, we have actually seen a rolling back of the powers of Holyrood, in particular following Brexit. We have had imposed on us the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, which restricts our ability to make simple decisions such as introducing a national recycling scheme or banning the sale of peat and compost. On top of that, we have seen the first indiscriminate use of section 35 of the Scotland Act 1998, in which Westminster has used a veto over democratically agreed legislation that has been passed by this Parliament. That is nothing short of an insult to devolution.

The past three years has thrown up, again and again, the limits that Scotland faces as part of the UK, aggravated by a UK Government that was so disrespectful of this Parliament and of the entire concept of devolution. However, we must not lose hope, and we should not lose sight of how we might shape our on-going vision of what independence is for, and how the powers of independence can make people's lives better.

That can start now, with a reset of the devolved settlement in Scotland. Both the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments have said that they support such a reset and are committed to working constructively together, but we have yet to see what that would actually entail. Will there be a change in direction on the internal market act? Will the incoming Government support the Sewel convention instead of breaching it at every opportunity?

At the very least, a reset must mean an agreement between this Parliament and the UK Labour Government, ahead of the next Holyrood election, setting out how and when a decision on independence can be made. What is the route to independence? What is the route to asking the Scottish people that democratic question?

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** You seem to be focusing on the route to independence, but what about the route for the 65 per cent of people in Dumfries and Galloway who wanted this Parliament to concentrate on making sure that Scotland benefits as being part of the union?

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

**Lorna Slater:** An interesting point arose in the previous debate this afternoon. In that debate, Douglas Ross seemed to say that democracy is something that we do only once, but Ash Regan then listed a whole bunch of democratic events—every single democratic event that has happened since 2014. That is because democracy is not something that we do only once; it involves going back and getting the consent of the people for the decisions that are made. That is why, I say to Mr Carson, we hold elections every five years and not just once.

In Scotland, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament must max out our powers in order to build a compassionate social safety net to protect—*[Interruption.]*

I hear some members chuntering about a “neverendum”. There is an interesting question about whether those members would actually like to campaign for the union, because I suspect that they would not—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Members, please.

**Lorna Slater:** Members can campaign for the union—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please sit down, Mr Bibby. Mr Carson. I will not have this shouting across the chamber from a sedentary position. It is disrespectful to the person who has the floor, who in this case is Lorna Slater.

Please continue, Ms Slater.

**Lorna Slater:** Members should enthusiastically campaign for the union, if that is what they believe in, but to not allow a referendum is a cowardly position. That is not a democratically justifiable position at all.

The Scottish Greens will do everything that we can to ensure that, by the time that the 20th anniversary of 2014 comes around, we are celebrating it in a fairer, greener and independent Scottish republic.

17:46

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** There is a famous play, “Look Back in Anger”, by John Osborne. I look back at the result of the 2014 referendum not in anger, but with sadness at the lost opportunities for this talented nation.

Until the declaration at Dalkeith, I had no idea whether we would win, and neither did the Tories and Labour at that count. When I saw that we had lost, I put a brave face on it, but I felt sick to the pit of my stomach.

The debate and the rallies leading up to that moment had been invigorating. Scotland was alive to the possibilities, or otherwise, of being an independent nation again. The 84 per cent turnout was ballot-proof evidence of that engagement. We can compare it to the 60 per cent turnout at the recent election. We should remember that Labour is in power with 34 per cent of the UK vote on a 60 per cent turnout. That is hardly an endorsement of either Labour or the voting system.

In 2014, much the same as now, the majority of the press were rooting for the union. Gordon Brown, like a dark sorcerer, produced, from his back pocket, the vow: greater powers if you vote no. Now, we know where that went—sorcerer that he was, it was smoke and mirrors. There were scare stories by project fear that pensioners would lose their pensions, the pound in people's pockets would be worthless and so on. That, together with the threat of being turfed out of the European Union, did the trick.

Here we are now, 10 years on. In Scotland, we voted 62 per cent to remain in the EU—every



single part of Scotland, every constituency and every council area did so—but we are out. Pensioners have one of the lowest pensions in Europe, and the removal of their winter fuel payment is the first—though probably not the last—body blow to the most vulnerable. Heating costs in Scotland are the highest in the UK, yet we are fuel-rich in green energy.

We were told that we needed the skills and economic talents of UK plc and that we could not hack it alone. We were told that having an independent economy would sink us, so instead we had Boris “oven-ready” Johnson—all bluster and no substance—and a Brexit that has cost the UK economy dear. He took us out of the EU in the middle of a pandemic. How many now regret that they voted to be out? Never a penny was seen of that £350 million per week that was promised on the side of a bus.

We were then gifted Liz Truss, who—with the stroke of a pen, or a tap at the keyboard—plunged the markets into chaos, panicked the banks and sent inflation into orbit. Pre-election, the First Minister and the Office for Budget Responsibility warned of an £18 billion black hole in the Treasury. Up stepped Labour, which finds that it is £22 billion—what a surprise! Pull the other one. In 2008, the banks collapsed. We in Scotland have known only austerity and Westminster economic incompetence. We were promised more of both by Sir Keir Starmer, and that has already begun.

What could we have had? At the top of the agenda is control of our own economy, the opportunity to invest in our natural assets, green energy, food and drink, research and development, tourism and so on. We could have been like other small European nations—members of the EU in partnership. We could have been in partnership with our nearest neighbour—my place of birth—England, in a similar way to the situation of the Scandic countries. We could have had a decent pension for our elderly. Of course, independence would not automatically have brought about a land of milk and honey, but it certainly would not be facing the grim landscape of a broken, bankrupt Britain.

I think that the Scottish people have seen the fraud that was the better together campaign. Successive UK Governments must have feared a referendum—why else would they block it? Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. The Scottish people will not be fooled again. Look back, not in anger but to learn from the past.

17:50

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I would love to say that it was a pleasure to listen to a second debate on independence, but it

is not, because I learned as a soldier a long time ago that fighting the battle in the same way as it has been fought before will get you the same result.

Lorna Slater said that she wakes up cheerfully every morning. I do, too. I wake up cheerfully because I am alive and part of the union. She wanted to know whether I would campaign for the union. I would campaign for it every day. For 12 years, I was happy to defend it when that was needed.

I remind members of what Barack Obama said:

“If you have to win a campaign by dividing people, you’re not going to be able to govern them”.

Remember that, because the independence campaign was all about dividing people, setting families against one another and setting people across Scotland against one another—*[Interruption.]* You can sit there and make as much noise as you like, but it was barely a year after the independence referendum—*[Interruption.]* Would you just—*[Interruption.]* I will give—*[Interruption.]* I will give way—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, but when two people are speaking at the same time, I cannot hear what each of them is saying. Please continue, Mr Mountain.

**Edward Mountain:** It was barely a year after the independence referendum when my son, having just returned from Afghanistan, was head-butted in Inverness by somebody who felt that he had no right to be there, because his father was a supporter of the union. That is not joyous; that is not civic. As far as going for an independence vote is concerned, if those people want to go forward with it, they have to prove their competence in government, and this Government does not have a record of competence over 17 years. We have higher taxes. We have a Scottish National Investment Bank that lost £14.6 million last year, and, when the committee questioned witnesses from the bank, they did not even know what the rate of return was on the £435 million that they had invested.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** On the basis of Edward Mountain’s logic, given that the incompetent Conservative UK Government lost tens of billions of pounds, should the UK still be independent?

**Edward Mountain:** I am not sure that I follow that logic. The United Kingdom is a united front of people who stand together behind one flag and one Government, and that is what I am prepared to defend.

We have rising waiting lists in the national health service, and there has been a failure to meet cancer waiting times, including for

chemotherapy and radiotherapy—I know about that. There has been a decline in our educational ability in maths and science; we have an increasing attainment gap; we have failed to reach our climate change targets; we have not had the A9 dualled, as was promised, or the A96; and we have ferries that are costing us at least £400 million, instead of £100 million, and which are seven years late.

**Lorna Slater:** Will the member recognise that he is describing the situation that we are currently in in the union?

**Edward Mountain:** Yes, but those are all things that—as, I am sure, Ms Slater understands—are the responsibility of the Scottish Government and that the Scottish Government can control. If she does not understand that, I am surprised that she was a minister.

Let us be quite clear that we also have an ageing ferry fleet.

As I made clear earlier, I am very happy to stand up and defend the union every day, and I will be very happy to raise a glass—albeit only with water—this evening to toast the Greens, because they have made defending the union easier through their incompetence in government, with their failed deposit return scheme, which will cost this country millions of pounds, and their failed action on rent control.

I say to members who are sitting in the chamber making lots of noise about why they think that Scotland should be independent that, instead of doing that, they should get on and prove their competence in government, which they have failed to do for 17 years. Frankly, I find that disgraceful.

17:55

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** I said in the previous debate that we should focus on the future, not the past, but that is somewhat challenging when the topic of this particular debate is specifically on what happened 10 years ago today. A decade ago today, the people of Scotland got to do something that few people in history have ever had the opportunity to do: exercise their democratic right to determine their national identity and their country's borders. In a world that is shaped by geography, conflict, colonialism and imperialism, it was a rare act of self-determination. When we go on a trip down memory lane, we can remember the remarkable democratic engagement that the referendum sparked, but let us not forget that it was not a universally positive experience. It is wrong to suggest that it was, and it is also wrong to not acknowledge the division that it caused, not just in the country but in families and between friends.

Most important of all, let us remember that the people of Scotland spoke, and they did so decisively in affirming Scotland's place in the United Kingdom. Of course, many things have changed in what has been an eventful decade since, with Brexit, the pandemic, Donald Trump, a land war in Europe and Prime Ministers and First Ministers coming and going, some more quietly than others. Furthermore, some of the leading figures in the debate are, sadly, no longer with us—I speak not least of Alistair Darling.

Other things remain the same: Scotland is still to qualify for a knockout round of a major tournament, and summer remains an all-too-fleeting event rather than an actual season.

The past 10 years should teach us all a lesson in humility—that none of us has a crystal ball and that we cannot predict with any certainty what will happen in the years ahead. In the same way that many on the no side could not have foreseen the Brexit debacle, the yes side could not have predicted the repeated collapse in the oil price.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** The member says that we do not have a crystal ball and cannot predict the future, but does he accept that, 10 years ago, the people of Scotland were told that, if they voted yes, they would not be in Europe and the economy would tank? All those things have happened under the union, so surely we can get some honesty from unionists.

**Neil Bibby:** Ten years ago, the Scottish National Party was willing to forsake its place in the European Union and was warned that the European Union was going to—[*Interruption.*] It was willing to forsake that. The SNP called José Manuel Barroso, the President of the European Commission at the time, “preposterous” for suggesting that an independent Scotland would have to rejoin the EU. Let us not be revisionist about this: it was the SNP that was willing to put at risk our place in the European Union. I have just said that many of us on the no side could not foresee Brexit, but, equally, I presume that nobody in the yes campaign could have predicted the collapse in the oil price during the past 10 years, which would have brought economic turmoil to a newly independent country.

We should have learned another lesson in the decades since the referendum, which is that, beyond the binary question of yes or no, there is a far richer debate about the devolution of powers, which is rooted in the realities of the modern world. For all the heat and light of 2014, both sides accepted that this was a dynamic debate that accepted two unavoidable truths, which were that the Scottish Parliament needed more powers, and that people wanted more decisions to be taken closer to home but felt that it would be better if Scotland retained elements of the union, including

the currency, the central bank and the monarchy—propositions relating to all of which were contained in the Scottish Government's white paper in 2014.

As I said, the constitutional argument exists on a spectrum; it is not just a binary question. That spectrum is not just about Holyrood and Westminster; it is about councils, too. Power close to home does not mean that power should sit exclusively in Edinburgh; it means power being handed down to our towns, cities and communities. However, under the SNP, Scotland has become more and more centralised in recent years. Councils have been relegated to the role of delivery agents for the centre, rather than being a genuinely empowered level of government. The same is true of NHS services and police services being centralised. I believe that those issues form the real debate about Scotland's constitutional future.

It is right for people to consider the best place for power to lie, whether that be at Westminster, Holyrood, local authority or community level, as long as they do so in good faith, not blind faith. There is and always will be a place for that discussion. However, as that discussion goes on, we cannot continue to look backward. We cannot allow every discussion about Scotland's future to be reduced to a look back at the past. The people of Scotland deserve better than that. They deserve action, ambition and a Government that is focused on improving their lives right now, not in some hypothetical independent future.

Let us not squander our time on debates that seek to divide us. It is time to move forward. Let us focus on the issues that matter to the people of Scotland. The path to a better future does not require breaking away from the UK. It requires vision, ambition and political will. Most importantly, it requires unity, not division.

18:00

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I raise my glass back to Edward Mountain and thank him very much for reminding us all of the vandalism of Alister Jack when he decided to put a wrecking ball through the deposit return scheme, wasting all that investment and the jobs that had been created. That is just one example of his and the previous Government's contempt for this Parliament, whether on environmental policy, economic policy, equalities policy or anything else.

I know that Mr Mountain might wish that, as he described it, we were all united behind one flag. He is perfectly entitled to wish for that, even though it is not true that we are, but he is simply wrong in saying that we are all united behind one Government. He has miscounted the number of

Governments in the UK. That is simply a matter of fact.

I am genuinely sad that, due to a personal appointment, I have not been able to be in the Parliament today. It feels like I have missed a very special atmosphere all afternoon, to be honest, and I wish that I had been there. I know that some people have been discussing the atmosphere during the referendum campaign in 2014. I have no doubt that there was some bad behaviour on both sides—I saw bad behaviour on both sides—but it was nothing compared to the political violence that we have seen in relation to British nationalism obsessions such as Brexit and, as we have seen this year, immigration.

We should all condemn political violence, but it is simply absurd to suggest that the 2014 independence referendum was some low point in our politics. In fact, I remember that on referendum day, like so many politicians and campaigners, I spent some time outside a polling station speaking to voters coming in. I spent that time sharing on social media examples of yes and no supporters showing empathy, interest, compassion and concern for one another.

My favourite example involved one of our campaigners in Edinburgh, who was standing outside a polling station with other yes and no campaigners who were all having a chat and exchanging a biscuit or two. A guy—probably in his 70s but maybe even older—came up to them and said, "How do you do this, son? How do you vote?" He had never voted before, but he was motivated in that moment to cast his vote and exercise his democratic right to be heard. The campaigners on both sides were far more excited about the fact that he turned up to vote than they were about how he was going to vote. I think that that characterises a great deal of the democratic spirit of 2014, and that is certainly something that we should celebrate.

It is important, though, to acknowledge the pain that some of us still feel. As I commented on social media earlier today, one of the most painful aspects is remembering having been dismissed—even laughed at and ridiculed—for saying that, if we voted no to independence, we would be endangering our place in Europe, because the UK was threatening to take us out of the European Union against our will. It is painful to reflect on standing in a national televised debate, expressing that concern and being dismissed, with the argument being treated with contempt, when, in fact, what we predicted is exactly what came to pass: Scotland voted to remain in the European Union but we were dragged out against our will, losing our freedom of movement—a freedom that is exercised by many Brexiteers but which they have taken away from young people.

However, I take heart from the fact that young people in Scotland do not seem to be resigned to that being their fate. They feel optimism and passion for a better Scotland, and I believe that, in my lifetime, they will make it happen.

If either Government wants to finally define what they mean by a reset in the relationship in the short term, I am open to that—I am all ears to hear what ideas they have for improving it. However, fundamentally, that must include an answer to the question that unionists have left unanswered for years now: if, at some point, the people of Scotland decide that independence is their preference, how may they express that decision? Those arguing for the union are entitled to do so, but they are not entitled to say that the people of Scotland cannot make that choice, and I believe that they will.

18:05

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Ten years ago today, I missed a day of school to do some final work for the yes campaign. I began my day standing at the Yankee pier, holding a yes sign and looking towards the horizon with an oil rig in the distance and a no voter behind me. I spent much of the rest of the day in Inverness, getting out the vote, before heading back over the Kessock bridge to spend the evening at the count in Dingwall as a member of “Generation Yes”. I had gone from genuine horror at the news that I was getting to vote early—after all, being able to vote before one was 18 was early back then—to devoting every waking hour to the cause that I had come to believe in.

Christine Grahame talked about what could and should have been and I feel everything that she said, because I am sure that we took the wrong road 10 years ago. However, that was not the final opportunity: we can still build a fairer, better and more exciting Scotland. When I look at the United Kingdom, I still cannot imagine that any campaign to join the UK would gain much traction if Scotland were already an independent country.

My party, and others who believe in independence, have a job to do to convince others. Ten years on, the biggest movement of the dial has been in response to Brexit. What people saw happen at that time, and what outraged them—voters in other countries taking Scotland out of the EU against our will when people in every single local authority here voted to remain—was a very public thing.

That got a lot of media attention then, but it is happening every day, both in tiny and in huge ways. From UK ministers taking years to sign a simple order on something that they had already agreed to devolve, to the bringing in of an internal

market act that has been used to limit this Parliament’s ambitions, what the Tories did to Scotland in 2016 is a regular occurrence now.

I know that resenting injustice is not good enough on its own to win hearts and minds—we must also inspire. I remember so much that was inspiring in that 2014 campaign. I stood on street stalls, talking to people whose mouths fell open at the idea that Scotland’s MPs very rarely have an impact on the makeup of the UK Government. I took part in debates and remember the feeling of being brand new to politics but still being asked to speak at a Scottish National Party branch meeting at a school hall when more than 100 people turned up to take part. I felt that my voice mattered.

Last night, I read a piece in *The Guardian* by other young people who were prominent in the yes campaign and who were also given platforms and listened to, but who do not feel that today. I hope that those people, or people like them, end up here. I hope that their voices will be lifted up by my party and by this Parliament, because they have a lot to say and to contribute.

I believe that the SNP will be the party that delivers independence, but we will not convince others to back us if we argue for independence just for the sake of it. The party must, like more than a million people in 2014, be motivated by hope and a belief that making our own decisions—and our own mistakes—will make a positive difference to ordinary lives. We must give those who were six at the time of that referendum—the next generation—a reason to jump on a bus wearing a political badge, a reason to dare to imagine a better country and a reason to show up and vote every time. After all, their vote, and who represents them, matters.

That sort of thing does not always matter right now, but I believe that I will see a Scotland where it does, if we as a party, and indeed as a Parliament, prove that Scotland can do better with independence.

18:09

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** While sitting in the chamber earlier today and listening to the nationalists going over the same old arguments about independence, I decided to look at the agreement between both our Governments that set up the 2014 referendum. It said:

“The governments are agreed that the referendum should ... have a clear legal base”,

that it

“should be legislated for by the Scottish Parliament”

and that it should be

“conducted so as to command the confidence of parliaments, governments and people”

and

“deliver a fair test and a decisive expression of the views of people in Scotland and a result that everyone will respect.”

That is the problem—the nationalists have never respected the result of the referendum and have embarked on a journey of grievance politics to make their case for another one.

We should not really be surprised. After all, all the SNP exists for is to try to rip our country apart. It exists not to improve the lives of Scots, to run our country well or to bring economic growth, but to sow division and use every tool in its nationalist toolbox to cause that division, even by using the doomed deposit return scheme as a weapon.

Its Scottish Green chums are no better. It must be the only Green party in the world to care more about division and gender ideology than about climate issues. *[Interruption.]* I am not going to take an intervention at the moment.

I do like the part of the motion that talks about understanding

“that support for Scottish independence has consistently polled at 45% to 50% of Scotland’s population in the decade since”.

That tells me that support to remain part of the United Kingdom has consistently polled at 50 per cent to 55 per cent, which shows that, despite a pandemic, a war in Ukraine, three new First Ministers, six Prime Ministers, Brexit, four general elections—one of which was meant to be a de facto referendum—Jamie Hepburn as independence minister and the constant stream of independence papers that even Humza Yousaf admitted nobody reads, the desire for independence has not increased one little bit.

It is time for this Parliament to focus on what it was created to do—to improve the lives of Scots with the power that it has and to put aside the constitutional grievance that is holding Scotland back.

**George Adam** rose—

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

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Adam, please sit down.

I call Mark Ruskell.

18:11

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I thank Lorna Slater for giving us the opportunity to have some fun with the buttons in the chamber and to reflect on those momentous times 10 years ago.

I was a yes activist in Stirling and a local Green councillor at the time. I will never forget seeing 16-year-olds in their school uniform turning up, class by class, to vote in that referendum. It was an incredible time of political empowerment. Emma Roddick reflected that it was perhaps one of the first times when she felt that her voice mattered politically. Oh, their voices did matter so much. It is a delight to see so many of those yes activists now taking seats in our local government and in this Parliament, and I hope that many more will take their own seats in the years to come.

I remember some great days, knocking on doors in the Raploch in Stirling. It was barbecue weather and folks—friends, family and neighbours—were out in their front yards and having a really good debate and natter about all the issues that were relevant to the referendum, from pensions to Trident. That was in a community that, historically, had had an incredibly low turnout at every single election, so to see that empowerment and to be part of that conversation was fantastic. I learned when to shut up sometimes, too, but it was wonderful.

That stands in contrast to what we saw a couple of years after that with the referendum to decide our future in the European Union, which was tarnished by the lies of the leave campaign and was built on ignorance. If I have one personal regret in politics, it is that I probably did not spend anything like as much time as I would have liked knocking on doors and talking to people about the benefits of the European Union and our role in that European family of nations. Due to the timing—it was so close after the Holyrood elections—I did not spend that time. I really regret that, because I wanted to bring the spirit of the independence referendum into the question whether we should remain in the European Union.

What is absolutely clear is that Brexit has been an utter disaster. We live in a world that is more interdependent than ever. We live in a world in which states need to show solidarity with each other, whether on tackling the climate crisis, delivering global security or delivering shared prosperity. However, that is not incompatible with independence. In fact, membership of the European Union requires independence. It requires sovereign states to join, work together and flourish. If members have any doubt about that, they should go to Ireland and see a flourishing and independent nation that is doing just that within the European Union.

When I see the sort of poll results that came out this week showing that 56 per cent of Scots want an independent Scotland within the European Union, my heart fills with hope for the future. Back in 2014, when I went to vote yes for an independent Scotland, I took my eight-year-old

son with me. I took a huge amount of pride in voting yes and had a huge amount of hope for his future. Now, my hope is that, now that he has grown up and is a man, he will have the opportunity to make his own choice for the future of this country. I hope that, along with the majority of Scots, he will vote for an independent Scotland in the European Union.

18:15

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** I thank Lorna Slater for securing the debate and I pay tribute to Christine Grahame, Edward Mountain, Neil Bibby, Patrick Harvie, Emma Roddick, Douglas Lumsden and Mark Ruskell for their speeches.

There is one reflection from this debate and the one earlier today that has not been teased out and reflected on much but which it is important to air in the Parliament. It is something on which I hope that there is agreement between parliamentarians and parties: that democracy is not a moment in time. It is not a single vote or a single question but how we govern our society. We trust the public to be able to use it, regardless of the party that they vote for or how they determine a question, which might be a constitutional question, of course.

That is why we regularly get to choose who represents us at what level—at local government, at Scotland's national level, at UK level and, previously, at European level. It also means that, more than once, we have been able to discuss, debate and decide on the constitution of the UK in relation to Scottish self-government. A devolution referendum was held not once but twice.

**Finlay Carson:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Angus Robertson:** If I can finish this thought, I will, of course, defer to the member.

A devolution referendum was held in 1979 and then in 1997. We were also able to determine the UK's constitution in relation to Europe in 1975. I was not there—I was still at primary school. That is a germane point about generations changing and new voters coming into society and also being able to have a say on big questions. As we know to our great cost in Scotland, there was a second European referendum in 2016.

I genuinely wish to impress on colleagues who have not embraced the point that I hope that all democrats in the Parliament agree that we should be able to decide and reconsider matters whenever we as a society see fit. Supporters of the union—I will give way to one of them in a second on this point—do not want independence. They wish to remain part of the United Kingdom.

That is important to them. I recognise and respect that. However, in a multinational United Kingdom, there has to be a democratic route to a democratic vote. It should not be a one-off.

If—however we do so—we determine that we should have another vote, we should be able to do that. I encourage everybody to consider how we can allow democracy to flourish when, in fact, a democratic vote is being denied. Especially if there is a change of circumstances, we should be able to take a view on that. Brexit was most certainly a change of circumstances.

**Finlay Carson:** Like Mark Ruskell, I spent many days and hours knocking on doors with civic pride. At door after door in Dumfries and Galloway, people said that they wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom. The unionist campaign drove people to vote as well. It was not just the yes campaign that did that.

On the question of when we have another independence referendum, the problem is that we had a vote—we will not argue about whether it was a generational or once-in-a-lifetime vote—and there was a clear message that the people of Scotland wanted to remain part of the union but, the morning after the vote, the Scottish Government started its campaign for another independence referendum. That is what does not sit comfortably with people across the country.

**Angus Robertson:** I have already acknowledged that, if I were a supporter of the union, I would rather not have to debate all this again and I would rather not have another vote. However, my question about what mechanism people who oppose independence agree, as democrats, should be able to trigger an important vote has still not been answered. We already have such a mechanism in a part of the UK, incidentally—such a mechanism exists in Northern Ireland. As part of the Good Friday agreement, there is the ability to hold a border poll, and that should be able to happen every seven years. There is a mechanism for Northern Ireland, but there is no mechanism for Scotland or Wales. There is, of course, a mechanism for England, because only a majority of parliamentarians in England need to vote in favour of a referendum and then it would happen if people wished it to. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that I am going to run into difficulty with time, so I will try to make some progress. I will be happy to speak to colleagues after the debate, of course.

As is noted in the motion, the referendum was an important democratic event. Wherever we sit in the chamber, we can all agree that we witnessed democracy in action. It was overwhelmingly positive. I am looking at Edward Mountain, because I know about his family case, and it grieves me. I am sure that it will make some

people on the other side of this argument uncomfortable to reread quotes from a former member of the Westminster Parliament who talked about bayoneting the supporters of independence. I am sure that the former MP in question was speaking metaphorically, but that kind of language did not contribute to a universally positive experience in relation to the referendum.

Having said that, I agree—and I have no doubt that the history books will bear me out on this—that the referendum was an amazingly inclusive event. It energised generations of people who had a belief that a different future was possible. I hope, too, that it energised some supporters of the union to make sure that the union might improve, although I observe that I have read not a single column by a single commentator who opposed Scottish independence drawing attention to the amazing progress that we have been able to see since 2014 on the basis of all the promises that were made by the no side.

The debate was, of course, lively. For many—indeed, for most—it was about hope and optimism. For months and years preceding the vote, it encouraged discussion and debate as vibrant and diverse as Scotland itself.

This year, we also marked the 25th anniversary of devolution—of self-government—in this Parliament. Scotland voted overwhelmingly—74 per cent of Scots did so—to reconvene the Scottish Parliament to address a democratic deficit. That followed decades of Westminster Governments imposing unwelcome and damaging policies on Scotland. The positive impact of devolution is indisputable. Decisions that were made in the chamber have made Scotland a better and fairer place. For example, there is free university tuition, minimum unit pricing for alcohol, a ban on smoking in public places, equal marriage, land reform, personal care for older people, 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare, and the child payment.

Of course, people will always be able to say, “Why not more of this?”, or “Why not less of that?” That is the stuff of politics—that is why we are here. We have to raise the votes—of course we do—to do it as well as we can. None of that is an argument against being able to make decisions closer to home. The benefits of 25 years of devolution have been delivered due to the strength of this Parliament and members across it in different parties, even those who opposed devolution in the first place.

We can agree, surely, that decisions about Scotland’s future are best determined by the people who live here. Devolution has evolved since 1999, with substantial changes being made to the powers of the Parliament in the Scotland Act 2012 and the Scotland Act 2016. Since 2014, the

Parliament has used those powers to set taxes on income, to reform the tax on house sales and to create the Scottish National Investment Bank. Members across the chamber have worked hard to respond to the best interests of Scotland and to major challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit.

Devolution can function only if UK Governments respect the decisions that have been reached by the devolved legislature and the safeguards that have been created to protect it, such as the Sewel convention. I very much hope that the UK Government is seized of that and that we are able to ensure that devolution works as it was supposed to, without it being undermined.

The turnout in 2014 was the highest recorded of any Scotland-wide poll since the advent of universal suffrage. Grass-roots campaigns for both sides emerged to discuss the challenges and opportunities. From 2007, this Government encouraged a national conversation and provided people with the information needed to make an informed decision on behalf of themselves, their families and their communities. That work has continued through a “Building a new Scotland” prospectus series that has updated the case for independence in the light of Brexit.

My concern is that the people have given the Government a clear mandate for a referendum on independence—there is a majority in the chamber for there to be one—and if that is not the best mechanism, I do not know what is—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary is bringing his remarks to a close.

**Angus Robertson:** I am still waiting for others to tell me what mechanism there should be—a clear and legal route—to be able to hold a referendum. The people should have the opportunity to determine their constitutional future again.

The Government has always sought a principled and pragmatic approach to engagement with the UK Government. There is a substantial opportunity to achieve better outcomes for the people of Scotland when we work together. We want to build relationships based on trust and understanding, which must include respect by the UK Government for the Scottish Parliament devolution settlement.

Since 2014, there has been much change and Scotland has faced its challenges, but there is much to be proud of, as I have highlighted. When it comes to Scotland’s future, much more work needs to be done if we are to create the modern, diverse and dynamic Scotland that we all want to see. As the First Minister made clear in this afternoon’s debate, we could make a greater impact with all the levers of powers of an independent nation. As we have seen since 2014,

decisions about Scotland's future are best determined by the people who live here in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate.

*Meeting closed at 18:26.*



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