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Scottish Parliament

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[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:33]

Motion of Condolence

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

We begin this afternoon's business, and I welcome the representatives of the Alba Party who join us today. The sudden passing of the Rt Hon Alex Salmond on 12 October has shocked and saddened us all, and we gather this afternoon to express our condolences as a Parliament.

Alex Salmond's contribution to the development and life of this Parliament is an integral part of our history. Elected to the Parliament in 1999 and one of the first members of this Parliament, Alex was leader of the largest Opposition party in our formative days. He was elected to the Parliament again in 2007 and elected as our fourth First Minister, serving from 2007 to 2014 and holding office throughout session 3 and much of session 4. He will be remembered for forming the first Scottish National Party Government and for winning a remarkable overall majority in 2011.

I have received messages of tribute from Parliaments and Governments worldwide, along with some personal reflections of meetings with Alex. All who have written remark on his immense impact on political life in Scotland. One says:

"The invaluable contribution of Alex Salmond to Scotland and his tireless dedication to public service are legacies that will not be forgotten. His commitment to the interests of the Scottish people and his vision for a strong and vibrant independent Scotland forged an indelible mark on the history of the nation."

All the tributes that I have received express sincere condolences to those who feel the loss of Alex Salmond most keenly on a personal level. It can be too easy to forget that such a well-known public figure was a husband, brother, uncle and friend to many. We hope that the countless tributes from far and wide provide some measure of comfort to Alex's loved ones. Our thoughts are with you.

I call the First Minister to speak to and move the motion of condolence.

14:35

The First Minister (John Swinney): It is with sadness that I move the motion of condolence on the death of Alex Salmond, the fourth First Minister of Scotland. On behalf of the Scottish Government and the people of Scotland, I express

my deepest sympathies to Alex's wife, Moira, to his family and to his friends.

Many tributes have been made since Alex's sudden death. They include the tributes that have been left outside this building and the many signatures that have been added to the book of condolence here in the Scottish Parliament and online. The flags on Scottish Government buildings flew at half mast at the time of his death, they did so again yesterday on the occasion of his funeral and they will do so again today as the motion of condolence is debated. The minute of applause that we witnessed at Scotland's recent football match with Portugal was a tribute to Alex's enduring love of the beautiful game.

Alex Salmond left an indelible mark on Scotland and on Scottish and United Kingdom politics and public life. He was born in Linlithgow in 1954, and it was not long before his reputation for being a rebel was built. He studied economics at the University of St Andrews and joined the Scottish National Party during that time, becoming an influential member of the 79 group.

Elected politics began for Alex Salmond in 1987, when he became the MP for Banff and Buchan—he was one of only three SNP MPs at that time. He went on to serve in the same constituency when this Parliament was first elected in 1999. In a political career that spanned three decades and two Parliaments, Alex became leader of the Scottish National Party in 1990 and again in 2004. He became the first SNP First Minister of Scotland in 2007 and served in that role for more than seven years. He led a Government that was wholly devoted to serving the people of Scotland. That Government and that devotion to Scotland and her people continue today.

I first met Alex in the SNP club in North St Andrew Street in Edinburgh in 1981. He had come to speak to—literally—a handful of young Scottish nationalists, of whom I was one, who were trying to stir things up in Edinburgh for our cause. Much of what I heard from Alex on that day 43 years ago is reflected in the assessments that we have heard in recent days of Alex's contribution to Scottish politics. He was creative in the arguments that he put forward. He was driven to make the case for Scottish independence. He was fierce in his analysis of political rivals and determined to challenge their positions. He was, in short, a "man o' independent mind"—that reference was taken from his favourite Burns poem, which summed up his politics and his aspirations.

I served for seven years as his finance and economy secretary. It was a relationship that was generally defined by the First Minister wanting to spend more money than we actually had available and the finance secretary trying to make as many of the First Minister's creative ideas happen as

was possible. It was never a relationship without challenging moments, but he recognised—perhaps reluctantly—that possessing financial credibility was always an advantage in government.

Many of the significant moments in my political life took place when I was working closely with Alex Salmond: our success in securing the re-election of Winnie Ewing to the European Parliament in 1994, where she was joined by our dear friend Dr Allan Macartney; Roseanna Cunningham's success in the Perth and Kinross by-election in 1995; my own election to the House of Commons in 1997; persuading our party to support a yes-yes position in the 1997 referendum; the election at that time of the largest group of SNP parliamentarians in one night in the 1999 elections to the Scottish Parliament; our entry into government in 2007; the passing of the first budget of an SNP Government in 2008; and the build-up to the independence referendum in 2014.

Those were all landmark moments that brought much joy, but I must acknowledge that our relationship changed over the past six years. We all know that, in life, human relationships can change. One moment, they are strong; the next, they are not. Politics is no different because, at all levels, politics is simply about people.

What cannot be denied by anyone is that Alex Salmond led the Scottish National Party from the fringes of Scottish politics to become the Government of Scotland and come close to winning our country's independence. That has changed Scotland and our politics forever.

It is now up to those of us who believe that Scotland should be an independent country to make that case and win that future.

I move,

That the Parliament expresses its shock and sadness at the untimely death of Alex Salmond; offers its deep sympathy and condolences to his family and friends; appreciates the many years of public service that he gave as an MP, MSP, and First Minister of Scotland, and recognises the substantial and significant contribution that he made over many decades to public life, Scottish and UK politics and the cause of Scottish independence.

[Applause.]

14:40

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): The sudden passing of Alex Salmond at the age of 69 reminds us all how precious but precarious life is. In the words of our national bard, who Alex Salmond often quoted,

“Nae man can tether time or tide.”

Just a few weeks ago, he was here in the Scottish Parliament to mark its 25th anniversary, along with His Majesty the King. In the hours before his death, Alex Salmond was still hard at work and engaged in political activism. However anybody feels about his politics, we can all surely recognise his duty and commitment to public service.

Alex Salmond served his constituents for decades as an MSP, an MP and First Minister for Scotland. It is in that spirit that I pay tribute to him today, because I confess that I did not know him and I never met him. I am unable to provide a personal tribute to Alex Salmond as other members in the chamber can. I was not as close to him as the First Minister was, having served as his finance secretary for many years. I did not work with him, as members on the SNP benches did for decades, or as Ash Regan has done in recent years.

I did not know Alex Salmond the man, but everyone in Scotland knew Alex Salmond the politician. He was a figure whose presence loomed large across my life and our country. Nationalist or unionist, there was no ignoring him.

As a former journalist, I appreciated his flair for understanding how to grab attention and make headlines. He was a powerful and commanding presence in this chamber and in the House of Commons. He was a formidable politician of undoubted talent, who could both inspire and intimidate. Many members across this chamber, whether on the Conservative benches or those of other parties, would be wary about the prospect of going up against him.

Beyond the corridors of Holyrood and Westminster, his influence shaped our society. He made a lasting impact on our country. How many politicians can we say that about?

It has been noted that Alex Salmond was a complicated and, at times, controversial figure, who divided opinion, often strongly. Today is not the occasion for a verdict on his every action. However, we can say with confidence that there will be a place for him in the history books.

He created modern Scottish nationalism and personified the independence movement of his age—those facts cannot be denied. From a unionist perspective, as someone who values Scotland's proud place in the United Kingdom, I will still pay tribute to a man who held the office of First Minister for many years.

From the outside, it seemed to me that Alex Salmond took the role of First Minister deadly seriously. It appeared to me, as a journalist and a member of the public, that he acted with great energy and sincerity. Although I profoundly

disagree with his vision for Scotland, I have no doubt that he was utterly sincere in his beliefs.

Therefore, I pay tribute to the service of Alex Salmond and I offer my party's sincere condolences to his family—especially to his wife, Moira. Our thoughts are also with his friends and colleagues. May he rest in peace.

“Nae man can tether time or tide.”

14:44

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): The sudden death of Alex Salmond came as a shock to me and to millions of people across our country. My thoughts and those of everyone at Scottish Labour are with his wife, Moira, his friends and family, and his colleagues in both of the parties that he led.

As we saw yesterday at his poignant send-off in his beloved Strichen, the loss of Alex Salmond has been felt keenly by people in his own local area as well as across the political spectrum and across our society. Alex was committed to his constituents and to the people whom he served in Holyrood and Westminster for more than three decades. He was a politician of rare and unique political ability whose impact and legacy on Scottish politics cannot be overstated.

As will be the case for others in the chamber and for many people who are listening at home, Alex Salmond was a big figure in Scottish politics throughout my adult life, so it will be hard to imagine the world of Scottish politics without him on our screens, on our airwaves, on doorsteps and even on podiums.

As has been mentioned, Alex Salmond joined an SNP on the fringes of our political life and, through his leadership, transformed the party and brought it into the mainstream of our politics. From the 1980s to the present day, Alex Salmond was a mainstay of Scottish and UK politics. In Westminster and Holyrood, Alex dominated the political scene and excelled as a parliamentarian of clear skill, with a gift for a turn of phrase. As SNP First Minister, Alex wrote his name into the history books and secured his place in our national story.

Many people might not know this, but Alex Salmond was a parliamentary colleague of my father at Westminster—they both served as MPs at the same time. I am not sure how SNP members will feel about this, but I recall Alex, on several occasions, trying to convince my father that I should ditch the Labour Party and join the SNP instead. He did not succeed in that, but that demonstrates Alex's bold confidence, which allowed him to confound the odds time and again.

For many of us, Scottish politics will never be the same without Alex Salmond. First and

foremost, he was a committed Scottish nationalist. He led the yes campaign with skill, energy and enthusiasm. It will come as no surprise that Alex Salmond and I had very different views on the future of our country, but, as the person who led the Labour campaign to remain in the UK, I came across him on many occasions throughout the referendum and, on every occasion, he remained polite and civil despite the temperature of that debate.

Never far from controversy, Alex never shied away from making his views known, with that characteristic confidence. He always made passionate arguments, and he knew how to get his points across. Let us not pretend that he was not of the ability, or ever afraid, to clamp a political opponent or journalist if he had the opportunity to do so, but, through it all, he kept his natural charm and his affability.

Scotland is a very different place due to the political career of Alex Salmond—a controversial but charismatic figure. His absence will be felt by many. He leaves behind two parties the existence of which he was fundamental to, as well as a generation of politicians in those movements who looked to him as a father figure and mentor.

This will be a particularly difficult time for many of Alex's former colleagues and for his friends and family, particularly his wife, Moira. He was a huge part of their lives, and I know that so many will be feeling his loss deeply. On behalf of Scottish Labour, I send my sincere condolences to all those who mourn the loss of Alex Salmond in this chamber and across our country. [*Applause.*]

14:48

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Everything that we do here we do despite our differences. The whole purpose of a Parliament is to bring people together, regardless of what separates us in political, professional or personal terms. That is never more true than at a moment such as this, when we are recognising the loss of someone who made a profound impact over many years.

Every politician, especially those who serve in the highest office, understands the impact on personal and family life. That aspect of the role is a sacrifice for the individual, but it is also a sacrifice for their family and friends, so it is important that the Parliament as a whole recognises the loss that Alex Salmond's family and friends are experiencing now and that we offer our sincerest condolences.

Especially in the wake of such an unexpected death, it is a moment to begin to acknowledge the impact of the life that has ended. People's lives and their legacies can be contested and complicated, so this is not a moment for an

assessment of the entirety of the man—there will be more appropriate times for that—but we can all acknowledge the scale of Alex Salmond's impact on Scotland's politics. The events of the past few years are an important part of his story, but they do not change the fact that Alex Salmond was the political personality who enabled the SNP to advance in its political journey.

When the Parliament first met, 25 years ago, the SNP had just a handful of well-known faces and names in national politics. Suddenly, it was the main Opposition party. Within eight years, it was not only ready to form a Government; it was chosen to do so by the Scottish people. When it did so, Alex Salmond called it what it was. It might seem simple to say it now, but he recognised that the office of First Minister is the highest office in Scottish politics and that the group of people who sit on the front bench of the Parliament, to be held accountable by the representatives of Scotland, are not merely an Administration but a Government. In showing his understanding of that and in giving the right name to this young political landscape, Alex Salmond advanced Scotland's political journey.

In the early years of the Parliament, the idea of independence was by no means in its infancy. A large minority had consistently supported it, but the case for independence as a viable proposition had barely been developed. Some people will remember Alex Salmond for the phrase

"the dream will never die",

but, in his time at the forefront of Scottish politics, he did more than most to turn it from a dream into a tangible, imminent choice—something that even its strongest opponents had to recognise as a real choice that Scotland could make work. That legacy endures, and independence remains an undeniably real and imminent choice, there for the taking, if the people will it. *[Applause.]*

14:51

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Today, we commemorate the sudden death of Alex Salmond, the passing of a political pioneer of our age. Whether we agreed with him or not, he challenged us to picture Scotland and its place in the world differently. Alex Salmond was an unapologetic disrupter and a formidable opponent for any parliamentarian or interviewer. Although we never sat in the chamber at the same time, I have faced him in debate and I know the work that my predecessors had to do and the preparation that was required to try to get the better of him, such was his strength in any arena.

He joined forces with the likes of Jim Wallace and Donald Dewar in the effort to deliver our Scottish Parliament, before going on to do

something that few thought possible by obtaining an overall majority in a Parliament that was designed for minorities. That result sparked the two-year-long referendum campaign and intense public discourse about Scotland's place in the United Kingdom—a discussion that continues to this day. That was perhaps the most significant moment in the life of this 25-year-old Parliament, and his role, his influence and his personality were all at the centre of that. In so many ways, today's SNP Government is one in his image, even a full decade after his departure from it.

There will be time to debate Alex Salmond's legacy and his political and personal impact, but today we recognise the substantial impact that he had on our politics. On behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, I wish comfort to all those who mourn him today, especially his wife, Moira, and his close friends and family. *[Applause.]*

14:53

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): We gather today not only to mourn the loss of a political giant but to celebrate the life and legacy of Alex Salmond, Scotland's most extraordinary First Minister. Alex was not just a leader; he was a unifying force, awakening the political consciousness of a nation and inspiring us to dream bigger for ourselves and for Scotland. To Alex's beloved wife Moira, his family—Margaret, Gail, Bob—and all who knew him closely, I say that the thoughts and sincere condolences of all in the Alba Party are with you. I hope that the tributes that are pouring in from across Scotland and beyond offer some comfort during this difficult time. We stand beside you in your grief, just as Alex stood beside Scotland in every battle, every challenge and every triumph.

Alex did not just help to shape this institution; he forged its very identity. Under his leadership, the Scottish Parliament transformed from an assembly into a Parliament. His energy, passion and political will were unparalleled. He loved this country with a pride that radiated from his very being. Even his critics could not deny the force of his conviction. When, against all the odds, he led the SNP to a historic majority in 2011, it was not just a victory for a party but a mandate for an idea that the people of Scotland should decide our nation's future. The 2014 independence referendum, spearheaded by Alex, saw 84 per cent of Scots turn out to have their voices heard. Although the result was not what many of us might have hoped for, the campaign ignited a democratic fire that has not been extinguished.

Alex Salmond's political life was dedicated to a profound cause: the belief in Scotland's right to choose our own path. Through that tireless effort, he took the Scottish National Party from the

fringes of politics to the pinnacle of Government, making it the dominant force in Scotland. His vision gave this nation the confidence that it had long been denied, and his accomplishments in office speak for themselves. Those included abolishing bridge tolls and prescription charges, eliminating university tuition fees, hosting the Commonwealth games in Glasgow, harnessing Scotland's green energy potential to position Scotland to take full advantage of the renewables revolution and, of course, the record-breaking Queensferry crossing. His ambition in devolved politics was a statement of competence and confidence in what Scotland could achieve through fairness, compassion and independence.

Alex Salmond was a man of intellect and strategy, but, above all, he was a man of the people. He had the rare ability to make complex issues accessible to everyone, and he took the time to listen to and speak to people across Scotland. Whether he was addressing a crowded village hall or standing before world leaders, he represented Scotland with pride, dignity and a wit that often disarmed even his staunchest opponents.

His presence on the world stage brought our cause to the attention of leaders across Europe and beyond, and his articulate vision of a fairer, more prosperous Scotland inspired generations. Alex showed us that the path to a better Scotland begins with self-belief, and he spread the message far and wide—ensuring that the seeds of ambition were sown in every corner of the land—that Scotland could stand tall, shoulder to shoulder with other nations, proud and independent.

His resilience and confidence were not just admirable but contagious, a source of inspiration that ignited a fire that encouraged us to aim higher and believe in better. He could dismantle an argument with a single quip or rally a movement with a stirring call to arms, his oratory skills leaving both colleagues and adversaries in his shadow. His voice, wisdom and unwavering commitment to justice reassured us all, even in the most challenging of times. He leaves behind a forever changed Scotland that is more confident, more assertive and, above all, determined to control its destiny.

Alex once said:

“The real guardians of progress are not the politicians at Westminster, or even at Holyrood, but the energised activism of tens of thousands of people who I predict will refuse meekly to go back into the political shadows.”

The people of Scotland will honour Alex Salmond's memory by carrying forward his vision as we continue to fight for a better Scotland, with the confidence and the ambition to become a normal independent nation. Let Alex Salmond be remembered as the First Minister who made the

political weather, a leader who inspired ambition by building bridges, not walls. Scotland's greatest First Minister may no longer be with us, but his spirit, his wisdom and his legacy will guide us forward.

Alex, like too many of those giants on whose shoulders we now stand, may not see the destination of their dream for Scotland, yet one thing is clear. His place on Scotland's journey is indelibly forged through his determined work and unwavering passion to prevail. [*Applause.*]

The Presiding Officer: We will now have a short period of suspension before we move to the rest of this afternoon's proceedings.

15:00

Meeting suspended.

15:03

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): We now continue with this afternoon's business. The next item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is Deputy First Minister responsibilities, economy and Gaelic.

Brexit (Trade Impact)

1. **Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the findings from Santander on the impact of Brexit on United Kingdom-European Union trade, as it relates to Scotland's economy. (S6O-03845)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): Considerable evidence is now available that demonstrates the damaging economic impact of Brexit. Researchers from Aston University recently estimated that, in 2023, exports of goods to the EU were 17 per cent lower and imports of goods were 23 per cent lower, and, according to analysis by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, the UK economy was 2.5 per cent smaller in 2023, all of which is attributed to Brexit.

In Scotland, despite our unequivocal vote in the referendum to remain in the EU, we are not spared Brexit's effects or its costs to the Scottish economy.

Evelyn Tweed: As well as lost trade, Brexit has led to staffing shortages in many sectors across our economy. What measures are available to the Scottish Government to reduce the barriers for business to attract EU workers to fill vital roles?

Kate Forbes: The member is right to highlight the particular impact of Brexit on staffing shortages. EU citizens who moved to Scotland and made a significant contribution to our economy have in many cases returned to their home countries.

It is deeply disappointing that the migration system is not currently meeting Scotland's distinct demographic needs. We have been clear that changes to the system are vital to support employers and individuals. We need a migration route that is tailored to Scotland's needs, particularly through a Scottish visa or a rural visa pilot. Both proposals are on the table and we hope that the UK Government will take them seriously.

Disabled People (Participation in the Economy)

2. **Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether the participation of disabled people in the economy is of significant benefit. (S6O-03846)

The Minister for Employment and Investment (Tom Arthur): Presiding Officer and members in the chamber, please accept my apologies for my failure to be present at the opening of portfolio questions. I misunderstood when the meeting would be reconvening.

The participation of disabled people in the economy is an important factor in individuals' ability to thrive and to lead fulfilling lives, and growing the economy is one of the Government's top four priorities. The programme for government sets out how we will support people who are already in work, help more people back into work and address long-term economic inactivity. Alongside our national employability offer, that includes improving access to health services by 2025 and introducing enhanced specialist support for disabled people across all 32 local authorities.

Jeremy Balfour: Disabled people make up around 20 per cent of the population in Scotland, but many of them remain unable to participate in society due to historical and systemic barriers that still exist. Does the minister agree that we deserve to have a champion in the shape of a disability commissioner to ensure that the future is brighter than the past?

Tom Arthur: I recognise the substance of the member's question and his championing of the idea of a disability commissioner. I appreciate that Parliament will consider that role in more detail alongside the broader commissioner landscape.

I reassure the member that this Government is committed to closing the disability employment gap in partnership with not only local government but the United Kingdom Government, given the significance of reserved areas in the employability landscape and the UK Government's agenda on closing that gap. I am committed to working in a genuine spirit of partnership to ensure that we close the disability employment gap so that we can have a Scotland where everyone who wishes to fully participate in the labour market can do so.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Anyone who wants to secure and sustain work should be able to do so, regardless of disability. Can the minister provide an update on the Scottish Government's ambition to ensure that people seeking work who are disabled or have long-term health conditions are offered support from a dedicated employability adviser, as outlined in the programme for government?

Tom Arthur: Through our no one left behind approach to devolved employability services, disabled people are eligible for support from a dedicated adviser in all 32 local authorities. Our statistics show that we are making progress, with the proportion of disabled people who are accessing our services increasing. However, we are committed to doing more to tackle labour market inequality, which is why we committed in the programme for government to introducing specialist employability support from summer 2025. That will ensure greater levels of support locally for disabled people to select, obtain and retain employment.

Enterprise Agencies (Performance Evaluation)

3. Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it evaluates the performance of the enterprise agencies in directly investing in businesses. (S6O-03847)

The Minister for Business (Richard Lochhead): Our enterprise agencies have a critical role in helping businesses to start and scale, be more productive, access finance and attract investment, develop new products and services, enter new markets and have a positive impact on communities. The agencies evaluate the support that they provide to businesses in order to assess the effectiveness and impact of their activity. They report on their performance throughout the year and publish their results in their annual reports and accounts. Scottish Enterprise also monitors investment activity in Scotland and publishes an annual overview of trends and performance.

Daniel Johnson: According to those published numbers, in 2023-24, Scottish Enterprise invested just 15 per cent of its budget, or some £53.4 million, whereas South of Scotland Enterprise invested 55 per cent of its budget, or some £35 million, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise invested 72 per cent of its budget, or £63 million, despite very different levels of funding. Given that funding for the enterprise agencies has fallen by £46 million in real terms since 2016, what steps will the Government take to ensure that it maximises the outcomes and the impact of investment that is undertaken by the enterprise agencies?

Richard Lochhead: Each enterprise agency takes its own decisions in line with the priorities for its region. Scottish Enterprise's co-investment in Scottish venture funds has been highly successful, with £158 million invested in 229 companies between mid-2015 and spring 2020. That investment leveraged almost £500 million from the private sector, achieving a 3:1 ratio. Over the past 21 years, Scottish Enterprise has invested £921

million, which has leveraged £2.45 billion of private sector investment. Clearly, Scottish Enterprise is of a different scale to the other enterprise bodies and it deals with different issues, just as Highlands and Islands Enterprise has its own remit, for example. The Scottish Government is very content with the results of Scottish Enterprise's co-investment.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Scottish Enterprise has delivered its strongest-ever performance on jobs and capital investment during a record year. Can the minister say any more about how we can build on the strong track record and continue to support businesses and drive innovation?

Richard Lochhead: The ambition in the current action plan that is being developed by industry is to better tailor existing and new support to specific requirements in the sector in order to grow Scotland's ambitious ecosystem, which includes strategies in relation to the national strategy for economic transformation. A number of policies are in place to build on existing innovation and successes.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): Young Enterprise Scotland plays an important role in offering enterprise education to schools, and it has done so for more than 30 years. Recently, it was reported that the organisation was at risk of closure as the Scottish Government had initially decided to discontinue its funding. Although I was pleased to hear that funding has now been allocated by the Scottish Government, such organisations should not have to wait for last-minute solutions. What action is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that such organisations are properly funded so that pupils receive education on enterprise?

Richard Lochhead: As the member will be aware, and as she referenced, the Deputy First Minister announced yesterday £285,000 for Young Enterprise Scotland, which is doing a grand job. The funding was never withdrawn; discussions were on-going. The Scottish Government values the work of Young Enterprise Scotland, which is evidenced by the support that we have delivered, as announced yesterday.

Games Sector (Support for Entrepreneurship)

4. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting entrepreneurship in Scotland's games sector. (S6O-03848)

The Minister for Business (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government is committed to supporting entrepreneurs across all sectors, including our vibrant games industry, which contributes significantly to Scotland's

economy and culture. We are delivering support through our key entrepreneurship strategies, including initiatives such as Techscaler and the ecosystem fund. We have funded Scottish games week for two consecutive years and consider games as a priority sector in our international Techscaler strategy. Following ministers' meetings with industry figures, we are also working with the sector to develop an action plan and strategy to better target support for Scotland's games ecosystem.

Clare Adamson: There is no specific mention of the games sector in some of the strategies, although they mention data, cyber, fintech and artificial intelligence in other areas. How can we enhance the games sector, which contributes £180 million in gross value added to the Scottish economy? It performs well in United Kingdom terms, but compare that £180 million with the almost £2 billion that is generated in Finland, where the sector plays an integral part in the country's technology sector, which is reflected in its funding. Does the minister have ideas about how we can improve the performance of the games sector even more in Scotland?

Richard Lochhead: As Clare Adamson rightly highlights, the games sector in Scotland has massive potential, which is why we are keen to hear the outcome of the current work by the industry on what a strategy for the future of the sector in Scotland should look like. There is a lot of cross-pollination between the games sector and other high-tech sectors in Scotland. We should do more to recognise and support that, and that could lead to more potential being realised in the sector.

Of course, the new edition of Grand Theft Auto is about to be announced in the coming months, and I read in the tech press that it is expected to become the fastest-selling game of all time. We should celebrate that, as a country, because it is one of many famous games that have been born in Scotland.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Grand Theft Auto was born in my home city of Dundee, and we should be proud of it. It is part of what is now the biggest entertainment industry in the world: gaming. Scotland has a really good footprint in that area, but much more can be done.

Will the cabinet secretary reflect on the particular success of Screen Scotland as a model for supporting a sector? What can we learn from that policy success that can be translated into the games industry?

Richard Lochhead: As I indicated in my previous answer, the industry feels that many of the wider benefits of the games sector in Scotland are not recognised to the degree that they should be. That is why we have given a commitment to

support it in the development of a strategy for the future of the sector.

Of course, I agree that we should consider what we can learn from Screen Scotland and from other policies affecting other sectors. We have many high-growth tech sectors in Scotland at the moment, and the technologies that are developed in the games sector are central to those other sectors. That is why we need more joined-up thinking in Scotland, and the games sector is keen to be at the heart of that thinking and not just siloed into one sector. That is an important way forward.

Chemical Production Sector (Grangemouth) (Economic Value)

5. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to sustain the economic value of the chemical production sector based around Grangemouth. (S6O-03849)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): We are committed to securing a long-term and sustainable future for the Grangemouth cluster. We will shortly publish our draft Grangemouth just transition plan, which details the shared vision for the future of the cluster as Scotland's premier location for investment in advanced chemical manufacturing. As part of the plan, which has been developed in collaboration with the Grangemouth future industry board, representatives from the chemicals manufacturing sector are supporting the development of a cluster strategy that is aimed at attracting new investment. That work will be supported by the Forth green freeport and the Falkirk and Grangemouth growth deal.

Michelle Thomson: The threat to the refinery is equally a threat to the chemical cluster and a threat to Scotland's economic economy. Given the recent award of Scottish Enterprise funding to Ineos for the green freeport initiative, what further incentives might be provided through the Forth green freeport, or directly to the cluster, to maximise long-term financial sustainability and enable growth, as outlined in the green industrial strategy?

Kate Forbes: Michelle Thomson makes an important point. I believe that the Scottish Enterprise funding that she is referencing is not actually part of the green freeport programme but is part of funding for exploration of the potential for hydrogen generation at the site. Grangemouth has the potential to be a significant part of Scotland's low-carbon transition, which is why we have confirmed £50 million through the growth deal and have jointly funded the £1.5 million project willow study, which was discussed again yesterday in my

regular meeting with the Secretary of State for Scotland. A range of specific interventions and supports are available.

Closure of Grangemouth Oil Refinery (Update)

6. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the potential closure of the Grangemouth oil refinery and any economic impact that this may have. (S6O-03850)

I remind members of my voluntary declaration of my trade union interests.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): As Richard Leonard will know, Petroineos announced on 12 September that refining would cease during the second quarter of next year. That is a commercial decision that was taken by the business alone and despite the joint efforts of the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments to secure those investments in the asset beyond 2025.

It is our understanding that the immediate impact of that decision will be the loss of around 400 full-time roles. We are all—jointly, as Governments—committed to doing all that we can to support the workforce during the transition period. That is why we announced the provision of tailored skills training at Forth Valley College, which is supported by both Governments and is targeted towards those who are directly impacted by the decision.

Richard Leonard: The cabinet secretary must know that the rate of unemployment in Grangemouth is already twice the national average and that this is a community that is already impoverished.

The statutory redundancy consultation closes in mid-December, so the clock is ticking, but there is still time to save these jobs. In the coming days, will the economy minister, together with the First Minister, intervene—just as I call on the UK Labour Government to intervene—to avert the redundancies and extend the life of Scotland's only oil refinery? Will it do so not only in the interests of those workers, their families and this community but in the strategic interests of our country's economy, energy security and national security?

Kate Forbes: Richard Leonard made an important point about the impact of the loss of those jobs on the local economy. That is precisely why, for the past few years, the Scottish Government has been doing everything in its power to save the jobs and to save refining at Grangemouth. We are still working to support individuals who are at risk of redundancy through the skills package that I talked about in my

opening answer. The funding that we have put in place will allow Petroineos employees at Grangemouth to access the opportunity to reskill, and we will support them with new employment.

The long-term future for the site is precisely why we are involved with project willow. We have spent considerable sums of money during the past few years looking for a long-term future for Petroineos. This is a commercial decision. We are all keen to jointly ensure that there is a future for those workers, and we are working together to do that.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): It is vital that we continue to support the workers based at Grangemouth and their families during this difficult time. I welcome the additional funding that the Scottish Government has provided through the Falkirk and Grangemouth growth deal. Will the cabinet secretary say more about how that will help to grow the regional economy and support the community and workers?

Kate Forbes: The £50 million that will be provided through the Falkirk and Grangemouth growth deal over the next 10 years is designed to unlock economic growth opportunities that will create the jobs that ensure that the unemployment rate is low and employment rate is high. We must not lose sight of economic inactivity.

Our investments in the growth deal include £2 million towards the sustainable manufacturing campus to allow the development of new technologies in the region and £12 million on the greener Grangemouth programme. The wider growth deal is expected to bring significant benefits during the coming year and to generate £628 million over the next 30 years.

Business Taxation

7. Bob Doris: To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the economy secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding how its approach to business taxation supports the economy. (S6O-03851)

The Minister for Employment and Investment (Tom Arthur): Ministers meet regularly to ensure that the economy is prioritised in work that is under way across Government. Our view is informed through extensive stakeholder engagement with the business community, think tanks, civic society, tax professionals and local government.

Bob Doris: I have previously supported that, and I have suggested that the large retailer supplement is an aspect of business taxation that could be revisited, as it is reported to have raised £95 million from 2012 to 2015. Given that the Fraser of Allander Institute has previously suggested that retailers make an excess profit of £30 million per year due to minimum pricing, what

assessment has the Scottish Government made of the economic impact and budgetary benefit of a future large retailer levy for large retailers that sell alcohol?

Tom Arthur: The Scottish budget for 2024-25 signalled an intention to explore the reintroduction of a non-domestic rates public health supplement for large retailers in advance of the next budget.

The Scottish Government has engaged with relevant stakeholders, including public health organisations and retailers, to explore the potential effects that the reintroduction of a public health supplement might have. We are committed to consulting the new deal for business group on the policy. That will ensure that considered and informed decisions can be made in the context of the Scottish budget for 2025-26.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The United Kingdom Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced a hike in employers' national insurance contributions to 15 per cent, which will hammer businesses across Scotland. However, the same budget has delivered substantial Barnett consequential to Scottish finances.

As we know, in the past two years, the 75 per cent rates relief has not been passed on to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in Scotland. Given that the Scottish budget might well be enhanced, is it not time to consider supporting our businesses with lower taxes, rather than doing what Bob Doris suggests and hitting them with even further increases?

Tom Arthur: As Murdo Fraser will be aware, there are non-domestic rates reliefs totalling £685 million this year. He will appreciate that the budget has just been delivered. Decisions about next year's taxation regime will be set out by the finance secretary at the budget, and we—rather like the bond market and everyone else—are currently digesting the UK Government budget.

Ferguson Marine (Port Glasgow) Limited

8. **Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made towards securing a long-term future for Ferguson Marine. (S6O-03852)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): We have been working closely with the board of Ferguson Marine to look at the options for a sustainable future. Graham Simpson will know about our willingness to provide substantial new funding to modernise the yard, to enhance productivity and to strengthen its ability to compete for new business.

Graham Simpson: The Deputy First Minister will be aware that Ferguson Marine is in the

running for the small vessel replacement programme, which is good news, but what happens if the yard does not win any of that work? Is there a plan B? Is Ferguson Marine in line for any other contracts? What is the plan to return it to the private sector?

Kate Forbes: I am glad that I was sitting down when Graham Simpson said that something was good news. I share his optimism on that point. We are all pleased to see progress in the procurement process for seven new small vessels. As he said, Ferguson Marine is one of the six shipbuilders that have been selected by Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, the procuring authority, to move to the next stage. He will know that, as per procurement legislation and guidelines, I am not involved in the review or selection process, and I would be loth to be drawn into commenting further on a matter that he might come back to criticise me on. We will leave it at that, but we can agree that it is good news.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a brief supplementary question from Stuart McMillan, who joins us remotely.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McMillan, would you put your camera on, please?

Stuart McMillan: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McMillan, you do not have your camera on, and we like to see people live when they are speaking.

Stuart McMillan: I welcome the Scottish Government's work so far to save the jobs at Ferguson Marine and its commitment to protect those jobs through the significant investment to help to future proof the site. Will the Deputy First Minister say any more about what she hopes to achieve from that investment and about the long-term benefit to the yard?

Kate Forbes: Stuart McMillan will know that, when I set out that additional investment, I said that it would always be subject to the completion of the necessary legal and commercial evaluations. Our hope is that the additional investment secures a long-term future for the yard by making it more competitive and more productive, meaning that it is able to compete when it comes to tenders for additional work. Ultimately, that is the route by which Ferguson Marine has a long-term future, which will put to best use the brilliant skills of the workforce at the yard.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on Deputy First Minister responsibilities, the economy and Gaelic. I apologise to those few members whose

supplementary questions I was unable to take, but we are very tight for time this afternoon. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next portfolio.

Finance and Local Government

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio this afternoon is finance and local government.

Community Assets (Youth Groups' Access to Funding)

1. **Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how youth groups can access funds to buy community assets. (S6O-03853)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): The Scottish land fund is a funding source for community groups that are looking to purchase assets in their community. It is open to all groups that are community led, community controlled and defined by a geographic area. That can include youth groups based in those communities. Any such group should contact the National Lottery Community Fund, which administers the Scottish land fund on behalf of Scottish ministers, and it will be given guidance and assistance on how it can apply to the fund.

Rhoda Grant: The 18th Inverness (Muirtown) scout group wishes to apply to Scottish Canals for an asset transfer of its scout hall. However, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 does not designate scout groups as community bodies that are eligible to make asset transfer requests. Scottish ministers have the powers under the act to designate and make eligible such organisations. Will the Scottish Government designate scout groups as bodies that are eligible under the act to make asset transfer requests? Their activities fall within the spirit of the act.

For transparency, I should say that my husband is a scout leader with the 18th Inverness (Muirtown) group.

Ivan McKee: As I said, the opportunity to purchase assets is open to all groups that are community led, community controlled and defined by a geographic area.

I am happy to take up separately with the member the specific instance that the she mentioned, to explore what opportunities there are to ensure that the scout group is able to be part of the process, because, as I said, it can include youth groups that are based in those communities.

Local Authorities (Balanced Budgets)

2. **Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has in

place for local authorities that may be unable to fulfil any legal requirements for a balanced budget in the forthcoming financial year. (S6O-03854)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): Scottish ministers remain committed to working with local government to ensure the sustainability of local services. However, local authorities have a statutory duty to set a balanced budget, and it is for locally elected representatives to decide how they do that.

Stephen Kerr: I was asking what the plans are in case that does not happen. What will the cabinet secretary do when a Scottish council cannot set a budget? Does she recognise the huge problems of health and social care overspends, wage bills, pensions and unfunded Scottish Government commitments? When will she come up with a long-term plan for local government to stop it teetering from crisis to crisis?

Shona Robison: I am not sure whether Stephen Kerr got the memo that the Scottish Tories are now looking to reduce spend across public services. That was certainly the outline that was given by its new leader, Russell Findlay.

We take seriously our responsibilities to fund local government. That is why we have funded local government with £14 billion, which is a real-terms increase. That is not just according to us but according to the Scottish Accounts Commission and the Scottish Parliament information centre.

That does not take away from the enormous pressures that local government and other public services face, which is why, as part of the budget, we will discuss those matters with local government, as we are doing, to make sure that we can support it to reach a sustainable position. Of course, yesterday, I set out the Scottish Government's plan to publish a sustainability delivery plan alongside the medium-term financial strategy in the spring.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): In evidence to the Finance and Public Administration Committee on 1 October, council leaders and directors of finance warned us that they are already at breaking point, with the delivery of statutory services under clear threat. Does the cabinet secretary not accept that it is her Government's chaotic and incompetent approach to budgeting that has left council services on their knees?

Shona Robison: No, I do not accept that, because the Accounts Commission and SPICe have both acknowledged and agreed with the Scottish Government that the local government settlement of £14 billion is a real-terms increase in funding, and, indeed, an increasing share of the

Scottish Government's discretionary spend. Despite all the financial challenges, local government has had a bigger share of the available pot.

That is not to say that I do not recognise some of the challenges that local government has. We are working closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and we will continue to do so, as we work towards the budget on 4 December.

Management of Scotland's Finances (Transparency)

3. Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to improve transparency in the management of Scotland's finances. (S6O-03855)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government is open and transparent on the Scottish budget and the management of Scotland's finances. Through successive open government national action plans, we have worked with the Parliament, its committees and wider stakeholders to improve understanding of our public finances, and 23 supporting documents were published for the Scottish budget 2024-25. We also intend to publish data on and analysis of public body expenditure by the end of November.

Foysoil Choudhury: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer. Parliament should be able to scrutinise the budget and ensure that the Scottish Government spends taxpayers' money effectively. Instead, we have creative, selective and often complex presentation of figures, key budget documents going unpublished and well-regarded voices, including those of the Fraser of Allander Institute and Audit Scotland, criticising the Government's failure on transparency. Can the cabinet secretary guarantee that all the agreed information will be supplied to the Scottish Fiscal Commission ahead of the Scottish budget? Will she use the 2025-26 budget to put an end to 17 years of creative accounting and financial sleight of hand?

Shona Robison: I do not accept that characterisation at all. In fact, for 17 years, we have delivered a balanced budget. For last year, we again had an unqualified set of audited opinion, so there has been no qualification by the auditors of the Scottish Government's finances. Foysoil Choudhury should reflect on that when he uses such language.

With regard to scrutiny and transparency, for this budget, I have agreed to attend additional evidence sessions with the Finance and Public Administration Committee and we will make sure that information is available, as we always do. I

very much recognise the important role of the Scottish Fiscal Commission. We will provide the Scottish Fiscal Commission with the information that it requires to produce reports, which I know are important for this Parliament's scrutiny.

Scotland's Fiscal Position

4. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of what Scotland's fiscal position would be today had the United Kingdom remained a member of the European Union. (S6O-03856)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): Independent researchers have tracked the fiscal and economic impacts of Brexit since the referendum in 2016. According to analysis by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, the UK economy was 2.5 per cent smaller in 2023 due to Brexit, and the gap may widen to 5.7 per cent by 2035. That equates to around £69 billion in output and £28 billion in public revenues lost in 2023. For Scotland, that is equivalent to a cut in public revenues of around £2.3 billion in 2023. That economic hole is a stark reminder of the price of Brexit.

David Torrance: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer. Given Scottish voters' overwhelming support in 2016 for remaining in the EU and the damage done to Scotland's economy by years of continued Westminster austerity policies, does the cabinet secretary agree that it is now more important than ever for Scotland to have the powers to decide its own future?

Shona Robison: Of course I agree with David Torrance on that point. The only route back to EU membership is through an independent Scotland, because, unfortunately, all the UK parties have abandoned their commitment to return to the EU, which is a deep regret.

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (Barnett Consequentials and Budget Allocation)

5. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of any engagement that it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding potential Barnett consequential funding, how much it anticipates that it will be able to allocate in its budget to address any risks arising from reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete. (S6O-03857)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): I welcome very much the improved engagement with the new UK Government, although I have also repeatedly made it clear that it needs to invest in public

services and infrastructure, which would generate consequential funding for the Scottish budget. We are assessing the implications of today's announcements by the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the Scottish budget, which is due to be presented to Parliament on 4 December.

Audrey Nicoll: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response. RAAC continues to impact more than 100 home owners in my constituency, who are required to sell their homes by agreement with Aberdeen City Council or through the use of compulsory purchase. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, in the event that no Barnett consequential funding is forthcoming, a timely funding solution that enables the council to purchase homes at a fair and equitable price, avoiding the use of compulsory purchase, should be sought as a matter of priority?

Shona Robison: As I said earlier, we need to work through the details of today's budget announcement, but I recognise that this is a very difficult time for affected households.

Aberdeen City Council is engaging with home owners on voluntary sales based on market value. In addition, the council has offered owners home loss payments of up to £15,000, disturbance payments and support with legal costs alongside rehoming support. Although the specific details of the offers are for Aberdeen City Council to determine, the council has stated that the use of compulsory purchase powers would be a matter of last resort. Officials continue to engage with council officers on the issue and will keep in close touch with them throughout the process to ensure that we understand the options that are available to the local authority.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a supplementary from Liam Kerr, who joins us remotely.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): This is a really important question—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr Kerr—you are absolutely 100 per cent with us. Please continue.

Liam Kerr: I am here, and I am here to deliver what is a really important question, because we need to be clear. Aberdeen City Council is offering the RAAC-impacted home owners the market value of their properties plus a home loss payment, but minus the cost of repairing the RAAC roof panels. The residents have abandoned the process, because it is unfair that they are subject to a RAAC penalty, which will leave many in negative equity. Given that the issue is ultimately about the underfunding of Aberdeen City Council by the Government, does the Government intend to proactively get involved, or is it going to sit this one out?

Shona Robison: First, I do not accept the point about the underfunding of Aberdeen City Council. I refer Liam Kerr to the comments that I made earlier about the £14 billion and the comments of the Accounts Commission and the Scottish Parliament information centre, which I know members like to quote, saying that there is a real-terms increase for local government.

However, I recognise the issue that Liam Kerr has raised about negative equity and the cost of repair, and I would certainly be willing to have a follow-up conversation. I would also want to look at RAAC generally, so perhaps that is something that we can talk about as part of the budget process.

Edinburgh (Affordable Housing Discussions)

6. Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the finance secretary has had with ministerial colleagues, City of Edinburgh Council and other relevant stakeholders regarding how its financial planning can support the delivery of affordable housing in Edinburgh. (S6O-03858)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government regularly meets ministerial colleagues and partners and stakeholders to discuss financial planning matters concerning Edinburgh and elsewhere in Scotland. Those meetings cover housing, along with other capital investment programmes.

Ben Macpherson: I thank the cabinet secretary for that engagement and the collaborative work that the Scottish ministers are doing across the board to support Edinburgh in its housing challenges. With a growing population and economy, demand for housing in Edinburgh is particularly acute. As ministers are aware, land in Granton in my constituency has the potential to meet a significant amount of that demand through the Granton waterfront development. Therefore, I would be grateful if the minister and officials could continue constructive dialogue with the City of Edinburgh Council and others about coming to a financial arrangement sooner rather than later to realise more of Granton's potential for the benefit of the people of north Edinburgh and beyond, because it could be transformational.

Ivan McKee: The housing-led regeneration and investment plans for Granton are ambitious and have the potential to deliver for local people and the regional economy by transforming lives, creating a strong sense of place and delivering jobs and prosperity. Officials are continuing to work with the City of Edinburgh Council and other key partners to explore options for how we might be able to progress the development.

Public Health Supplement (Retailers) (Assessment)

7. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has carried out regarding the potential impact of introducing a public health supplement to be paid by retailers in Scotland. (S6O-03859)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government has engaged with relevant stakeholders, including public health organisations and retailers, to explore the potential effects that the reintroduction of a public health supplement might have. That will ensure that considered and informed decisions can be made in the context of the Scottish budget for 2025-26.

Liz Smith: In relation to the Scottish National Party's new deal for business, ministers promised "Meaningful communication", "Evidence-based decision making" and "no surprises" to the business community. Why is it that, nearly a year on, retailers are saying that they have been left in the dark when it comes to the possibility of this surtax? There has been no cost benefit analysis and no business and regulatory impact assessment. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that, if the proposal were to go ahead, we would have the highest business rates in the United Kingdom, with the resulting burdens that that would place on costs and shop prices?

Shona Robison: There has been engagement with the Scottish Government and retailers. A number of retailers have reported how a public health supplement could impact their business, which is of course being considered as part of the exploration of the policy. As part of the commitment to the new deal for business, to which Liz Smith referred, we are committed to engaging with relevant stakeholders, including retail businesses, to ensure that the impact of any proposals on business is fully understood. Ministers have discussed the reintroduction of a non-domestic rates public health supplement in meetings with stakeholders and in other forums, and that will continue to be the case.

Local Government Finance Settlement (Discussions)

8. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it is having with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities regarding the 2025-26 local government finance settlement. (S6O-03860)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): As is the case in advance of every budget, we are having regular and routine engagement with COSLA and

individual local authorities as we shape our proposals for 2025-26.

Alex Rowley: The cabinet secretary must be aware of the massive cuts that are being made in communities up and down Scotland. Proposals have been made to shut libraries in Perth and Kinross, and swimming pools, community centres and other community facilities are being affected. Youth services have been devastated and housing lists are growing. Does the cabinet secretary accept that, unless the Government gives a larger share of the cake to local councils, public services at community level will be devastated?

Shona Robison: As I said earlier, we are giving councils a larger share of the cake of discretionary spend—that share has gone up by about 1 per cent.

However, I acknowledge the point that Alex Rowley makes. It is undoubtedly the case that there is pressure on public services, and local authorities are no different in that regard. We cannot have more than 10 years of austerity for that not to be the case. As we enter the budget process, I am more than happy to discuss with Alex Rowley his views and ideas on local government. If he would like to meet me to have such a discussion, I would be more than happy to do so.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary expect that the 2025-26 settlement will reverse a decade of cuts and stop cuts such as those that are proposed in North Ayrshire, where the local authority proposes to remove 90 teaching jobs, to impose a charge of £50 for food waste collection and to reduce other bin collections from three-weekly to four-weekly?

Shona Robison: As I said, there is pressure on all public services. Local government has an increased share of the overall discretionary spend, but I recognise the pressure on services. We will look at that, along with all the other priorities for the budget for 2025-26. We are having regular dialogue with COSLA and, indeed, individual local authorities, in the course of which many of those points are made. I am more than happy to discuss the matter with others across the Parliament. If Katy Clark wants to meet me, I extend to her the same offer that I extended to Alex Rowley.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Given the significant implications for the Scottish budget and the Scottish Government's ability to provide a suitable settlement for local government, can I ask the cabinet secretary to give an initial reaction to the UK budget in relation to local government?

Shona Robison: We are working through the detail of the budget. I recognise that it is very much a step in the right direction, particularly in relation to the capital availability for 2025-26. We

need to work through the detail on issues such as the impact of national insurance employer contributions to the public purse. That will be one factor that we need to look at.

However, it is not possible to address more than a decade of austerity in one budget, so we need to see investment continue in order to repair the damage of years of austerity and the removal of £15 billion of resources from public services since 2021. That will take more than one budget to address, but we are pleased that our calls for investment in public services have been heeded. As I said, what we have seen today is a step in the right direction.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Councils cannot be expected to deal with the implementation of policy when they are continually squeezed to breaking point while the costs of delivering statutory duties, such as those relating to social care, keep on rising. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that the forthcoming local government finance settlement provides the real-terms increase in discretionary spending powers that local authorities require?

Shona Robison: As I said earlier, we will look at that and will talk to COSLA and local authorities and, indeed, individual members across the chamber about the local government settlement.

However, I think that Alexander Stewart has not got the memo from his leader, Russell Findlay, who has made it clear that spending on public services needs to be reduced in order to fund a reduction in taxes. It is not possible to increase funding on local government or anything else and to reduce taxes at the same time. That is simply not credible or economically literate.

We will continue to discuss such matters. I am more than happy to meet any member who wants to talk about the funding of local government as part of the budget discussions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio question time. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business.

Schools (Funding)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-15060, in the name of Miles Briggs, on funding for teachers and schools in Scotland. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

I advise members that we have absolutely no time in hand, so you will be required to stick to your allocated speaking times. If you start your peroration at the point at which you should have concluded, your microphone will be switched off.

15:50

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Deputy Presiding Officer, from what you have just said, I think that you would make a good headteacher.

I thank my Scottish Conservative colleagues, Liam Kerr and Sue Webber, for the power of work that they undertook as my party's spokesman on education and skills and as the convener of the Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee. In taking up my new role, I look forward to working with the cabinet secretary and education spokespeople from other parties.

We on the Conservative benches want to work to make sure that all of our young people have the best start in life, so I am pleased that the Scottish Conservatives are using our first party business debate under Russell Findlay's leadership to raise the concerns of parents, teachers and our young people about the situation in many of our classrooms today.

I am proud to have attended good state primary and secondary schools in Perthshire. Looking back, that good, high-quality comprehensive Scottish education gave many of us the opportunity to get ahead, regardless of our background. It was a system where teachers had the freedom and ability to focus on teaching and making sure that young people were equally focused on learning and achieving the best possible outcomes.

I know, from teachers who I have spoken to since I was given this job, that today they want the same opportunity to deliver for our young people in schools, but reforms over the past few years have significantly reduced that opportunity. We have now seen that reflected in outcomes, with the decline in literacy and numeracy.

After almost two decades of Scottish National Party rule, the opportunity for our young people to succeed has been undermined, our global reputation has been severely tarnished, standards have been allowed to fall, subject choices have

shrunk and our schools are plummeting down international educational league tables. New data that was published in August shows that pass rates for national 5, higher and advanced higher qualifications have all fallen, while the attainment gap between the richest and poorest pupils in our country is increasing. We have to be honest that not all is well in Scottish education. If we are to realise the potential of all of our young people, we urgently need to fix the problems that our schools face and help to restore Scottish education standards to where they should be—at the top of the international educational league tables.

After 25 years of devolution, educational decline has taken place in Scotland, and most of that time has been under the SNP Government. There is real concern about the cabinet secretary's decision to withhold £145 million of funding from local authorities. That will risk teacher numbers across Scotland declining further, and teacher numbers in Scotland have already fallen over the past two years. Parents, teachers and young people are concerned by the real threat to teacher numbers in Glasgow and to the school week in Falkirk, and ministers cannot just blame councils for the situation when it is SNP ministers in Holyrood who hold the purse strings.

We need a proper national workforce plan, and it should shame SNP ministers that so many qualified teachers are already struggling to obtain permanent employment in Scotland today. The Scottish Teachers for Permanence Campaign estimates that more than 3,800 qualified teachers in Scotland are searching for permanent workplaces across the country. The situation is unacceptable, and the teaching profession is looking for leadership, not excuses.

Furthermore, the SNP's consistent underfunding of local authorities has placed additional support needs services in a precarious position; the numbers of ASN teachers has consistently declined since 2010. More than 250,000 pupils in Scotland need additional support, and they have been consistently let down by this SNP Government, which has overpromised and underdelivered. Pupils, parents and teachers deserve better.

The Scottish Conservatives have always tried to work constructively to deliver for our young people. That is why I have to say that I have a major concern about the decline in literacy levels in Scotland, with more than one in four Scottish state school pupils not achieving literacy levels. If our young people cannot read, they cannot learn. Scotland faces a growing literacy crisis, with up to 30 per cent of secondary school students having a reading age two or more years below their actual age, and many are much further behind.

Scotland's literacy challenges are not a recent development, but they are getting worse. The Clackmannanshire study, which was published in the early 2000s, was a landmark piece of research, but ministers have failed to deliver what that research suggested. At the same time, literacy rates in England are improving, so we need to learn from some of the teaching down south. Specifically, I appeal to the cabinet secretary to look at how we can reform literacy teaching in schools.

Over the recess, I looked at phonics teaching, and there are compelling findings from the work that is taking place in English schools. I hope that the cabinet secretary will be open to pursuing that approach, because the effectiveness of phonics teaching is now quite obvious. The study found that children who were taught phonics excelled not only in word reading but in comprehension and spelling. Despite those compelling findings, Scotland has made limited progress in implementing the study's recommendations at the national level. That is why I make no apologies for the approach that I intend to take in focusing on outcomes and looking at how we can empower our teaching professionals.

There is nothing more important for the future of Scotland than the education that we provide for our young people to enable them to go on to achieve their potential. After 17 years of SNP Government, the facts are that classroom standards are plummeting, violence is rising, young Scots—often those from the poorest backgrounds—are being left behind, teacher numbers in Scotland are declining, secure full-time posts are scarce and there is the risk of cuts to school hours and to the number of additional support assistants. In the coming weeks and months ahead of the election, the Scottish Conservatives will demonstrate how we want to bring common sense back to our classrooms and put Scottish education back to where it should be—at the top of international league tables.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the Scottish Government withholding £145 million in funding from local authorities will risk teacher numbers across Scotland declining further; notes that teacher numbers in Scotland have already been declining for two years in a row; acknowledges that many teachers are already struggling to obtain permanent employment; recognises the efforts of the Scottish Teachers for Permanence Campaign, which represents 3,800 teachers searching for permanent work in Scotland; expresses alarm about potential cuts to classroom assistant numbers and the school week due to shortfalls in local authority funding from the Scottish Government, and believes that Scottish Government funding should be used to improve Scotland's schools.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Briggs. That was exemplary time keeping to kick us off.

15:57

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): I take this opportunity to welcome Miles Briggs to his new position in education. I know that he cares passionately about improving outcomes for Scotland's children and young people. In that endeavour, he will always find an ally in me.

Miles Briggs made a number of points relating to phonics and literacy, and I am particularly interested in those issues. I give him a commitment that I will come back in Government time to debate those very issues, with a focus on how we can improve literacy following the pandemic.

Today, I want to listen to the challenge from Opposition parties. As the Government amendment sets out, we will call on the Parliament to unite behind the basic principle that teacher numbers in Scotland should be maintained and that local authorities should use the £145.5 million that is on offer from the Scottish Government for that purpose.

Scotland's teachers are the beating heart of our education system. They play a crucial role in our children's education and are vital to our collective ambition to close the poverty-related attainment gap. I say to those in my former profession that the Government values them, their expertise and the compassion that they provide our young people every day. The extra mile that they go for our children makes a difference, and we are lucky as a country to have them.

Not a single MSP or political party believes that the real challenges that our schools face, which Miles Briggs outlined, will be solved by having fewer teachers in our schools, so I ask colleagues across the chamber to unite to make it clear that that funding should be accepted by local government to maintain teacher numbers.

Let me be clear with members about what voting against the Government's amendment will mean. They will be making it clear that they support giving local authorities the green light to cut teacher numbers.

Miles Briggs: Dr Sue Ellis, a former professor of education at the University of Strathclyde, has stated that councils are

"stuck between a rock and a hard place",

and I am sure that the cabinet secretary has seen the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities briefing about that. Does she agree that that is the position that the Scottish Government has put councils in on teacher numbers?

Jenny Gilruth: I would not agree. A number of local authorities have managed to maintain

teacher numbers, and I would like to give them the funding right now. I would like to have given it to them in February, but a number of local authorities that Miles Briggs knows about have not done that, as we have recently debated in the chamber. The proposition that I think is being advanced by the Conservatives today—Mr Briggs can correct me if I am wrong—is that I should allow funding to flow out of the door, knowing that some local authorities have cut teacher numbers. That is not a position that I can justify.

I want to reiterate again today the Government's long-standing policy and financial commitment to protecting teacher numbers.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Gilruth: I have no time in hand, unfortunately.

As education secretary, I will fervently defend that policy. I am absolutely clear that it will be much more difficult for our schools to respond to the challenges, whether it be the programme for international student assessment—PISA—results, behaviour, attendance or increasing additional support needs, with fewer teachers. The professionals who make a difference in our schools are our teachers.

Labour's Opposition debate back in May established that we had unanimous support across the Parliament for protecting teacher numbers. In May, colleagues specifically asked the Government to prevent teacher job losses. I expect that members from across the chamber will therefore support the Government's amendment, which calls on the COSLA to do just that. I am looking to make sure that the funding is issued in such a way that it is spent only on maintaining teacher numbers and not on other things, in line with the 2024-25 budget that Parliament voted for.

Members will recall the historical position on that funding. It allowed it to flow to local authorities, which then put the Government in a challenging position come teacher census day, when some councils maintained or increased and others that had taken the money cut jobs anyway. This year, we know that some councils have budgeted with the expectation of the funding flowing, and they have cut teacher numbers. That is not a position that I can support, because it is that ring fencing that is protecting investment in Scotland's education system. There have been more than 2,000 extra teachers in Scotland's schools since 2018, and there have been 725 extra learning support assistants in the past year alone, which means that we have the lowest pupil teacher ratio in the United Kingdom. There has been £1 billion of investment through the Scottish attainment

challenge, which is supporting an extra 3,000 staff, including 1,000 extra teachers.

I recognise the challenges that are faced by those who are seeking permanent employment opportunities, and the Tory motion also references that. It is an issue that I am deeply frustrated by personally, because it relates directly to the local authority employment practices that differ across the country and are not currently in the gift of the Government. It is, however, worth reminding Parliament that the number of teachers who are employed in permanent positions has remained roughly stable at 80 per cent since 2014. However, as I was discussing with a teacher in Fife only this morning, precarity of employment, particularly at the primary level, can have a deeply detrimental impact on the wellbeing of teachers and it also directly harms retention. It is for that reason that the Government will look to accept the Labour amendment.

Presiding Officer, I am conscious of the time. There is a lot to be positive about in Scottish education. The Government is clear that we will not withhold funding from any council that can show in the annual census that it is spending it on teachers. Many councils in Scotland have done exactly that, and I thank them. However, I ask members across the chamber to unite behind the Government amendment tonight and to make it clear that the £145.5 million that is being made available should be accepted by local government to maintain teacher numbers.

I move amendment S6M-15060.3, to leave out from first “believes” to end and insert

“calls on COSLA to accept the £145.5 million that is being made available by the Scottish Government to maintain teacher numbers, in line with the Budget (Scotland) Act 2024, as voted for by the Parliament.”

16:03

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I am pleased to open the debate for Scottish Labour and to welcome Miles Briggs to his new role. Teachers are the beating heart of our education system. They are crucial to supporting our young people and their attainment. They help young people to rise above their circumstances and buck the trend. I know that that is true because I am here, in this place, because of that.

The cabinet secretary also recognises that. She has said that teachers are crucial to raising attainment and closing the attainment gap, which is why it is such a disappointment that the Government has failed to recruit the 3,500 more teachers that it said it would recruit and that teacher numbers dropped by 160 across Scotland last year, which has left teachers overworked and undersupported. While teacher numbers are

dropping, everyone knows that we need more teachers in some localities and subjects and to meet commitments on non-contact time and class sizes.

To add to the mess, we are in the bizarre situation where we have vacancies in teaching, yet thousands of newly qualified teachers are unable to get permanent jobs. Of the more than 2,800 teachers who completed their probation a year ago, only 29 per cent are in full-time permanent positions. The situation is having a real impact on people’s lives. One teacher told Scottish Teachers for Permanence:

“I am now into my 5th year of teaching and am still working between fixed term contracts and supply work. I strongly believe that the lack of permanent jobs is having a negative impact of teachers mental health however it is also severely disruptive to the children”.

However, recruitment is not the only issue—we also have a crisis in retention. A recent survey by the General Teaching Council for Scotland found that, among those who left in the early stages of their careers, 40 per cent cited difficulties in securing a post, 19 per cent cited lack of support and 18 per cent cited stress. The situation is unsustainable. Our amendment seeks to address that—the Government’s amendment falls short of doing so—because we recognise the importance of supporting teachers and the staff around them.

The number of children with additional support needs is increasing, and they need a host of staff to support them—not only teachers. As the saying goes, it takes a village. That is why it is worrying that the number of ASN staff has dropped and that the support services around schools have been somewhat hollowed out.

Jenny Gilruth: Will the member take an intervention?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Do I have any time in hand, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Not very much.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I will take a brief intervention.

Jenny Gilruth: Does the member at least acknowledge that, in the past year alone, the number of additional learning support assistants has increased by 725, specifically because of ring-fenced investment from the Government to protect funding to the sector?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: As the cabinet secretary knows, the situation for pupils with additional support needs in Scotland is, as the Education, Children and Young People Committee has said, intolerable, and it is not improving on the Government’s watch. The result is that one in four children is being rejected by child and adolescent mental health services. One in six children who

are identified as being in need of treatment waited more than four months to get help. The problems are deeper and wider than the Government seems to recognise. It thinks that the answer to the crisis is to hold councils to ransom by withholding £145 million from them—that beggars belief.

The gross underfunding of local authorities means that education in general is in crisis. Some schools are having to use pupil equity funding money to recruit staff. Glasgow is cutting 450 posts, which is leaving some schools with only one member of staff in front of a class, and others are reducing teacher hours. The situation is out of control, and I am afraid that I do not think that the Government has grasped the depth or scale of the problem.

However, it does not have to be that way. A good, committed Government that is showing leadership can support education. The UK Labour Government has just demonstrated that today in the budget. It has put the many before the few by adding VAT to private school fees, tripling funding for free breakfast clubs, increasing school budgets by £2.3 billion, investing in school-based nurseries, increasing support for ASN by £1 billion and announcing an additional £300 million for further education. Those are the choices of a Government that supports education, and people in Scotland need the SNP Government to do the same.

I move amendment S6M-15060.3, to insert at end:

“; further believes that there should be regular and transparent national level data collected on vacancies in teaching roles and the numbers of registered teachers on supply lists, alongside closer monitoring of the proportion of newly qualified teachers who are in teaching roles, and reiterates that the Scottish Government should publish a comprehensive plan to address gaps in the teaching and school staff workforce as resolved by the Parliament on 15 May 2024.”

16:07

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I was proud of the £145 million that was included in the budget when the Greens joined the Government in 2021. It was the most significant request that we made in that first budget, but I am not suggesting that it was entirely down to us. We put that forward, but SNP colleagues clearly supported it, too. That should have been enough for every teacher in Scotland who was on a temporary contract to be moved on to a permanent one and for recruitment to hundreds of new permanent teaching posts, but that obviously did not happen. There is no single reason for that. Inflation had a significant impact, as it seriously eroded the spending power of the Scottish Government and local authorities. The resultant pay deal with the teaching workforce made maintaining numbers

with the same amount of funding far more challenging. It is also a reality that that happened at the same time as the introduction of the Verity house agreement, which was a reset of the relationship with local government.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Ross Greer: No, I am afraid not; I do not have time.

We need to rethink that approach; £145 million of public money was spent with the intention of resulting in more teachers, but we ended up with fewer teachers at the end of that first financial year. I do not think that that is all the fault of the Scottish Government. Councils have seriously undermined trust, but they are not the only ones that undermined the Verity house agreement; the Scottish Government clearly undermined it with the council tax freeze. We need to see all that in the wider context.

The issue here is threefold. Quite legitimately, the Scottish Government wants to protect teacher numbers and, quite legitimately, councils want to avoid having to make devastating cuts in other areas. Pam Duncan-Glancy mentioned support staff as an obvious example of that. However, the money does not exist to resolve both those challenges simultaneously. That funding question needs to be resolved in the longer term. The proposed Green amendment spoke to that, and I will come back to that later, but there is a much more urgent need to find a compromise now.

The first issue is a point of dialogue. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities wants to declare a formal dispute, and the Scottish Government rejects that. To be frank, I think that that is a semantic point and I do not particularly care. However, there is a need for some kind of space for more dialogue.

COSLA has rejected the First Minister's most recent response to it. It insists that the issues of teacher numbers, the national care service and the council tax freeze should be discussed together outside the annual budget process. As much as I have sympathy with the Scottish Government's position, I think that showing some good will and, at the very least, agreeing to that discussion taking place outside the budget process might create the space for us to make progress.

Over the past couple of weeks, councillors in a variety of local authorities have raised with me another issue, as they were not sure whether this was an all-or-nothing position. If some councils were to fail to spend the money as the Government had prescribed, would the money be taken back from all councils? From what the cabinet secretary has said, that is not my understanding—I see that she is nodding. This is

on a local authority by local authority basis. However, there is clearly a communication issue that is hampering any chance of reaching a compromise.

I return briefly to the impact of the pay deal, because we need to acknowledge that the same amount of cash simply will not pay for the same number of teachers as it did a couple of years ago. As some kind of compromise, the Government should be open to discussions about maintaining spend as opposed to maintaining overall teacher numbers. Compromise is possible and the Scottish Government should be open to one. I do not expect that we will hear about it in the debate, if for no other reason than the constraints of time. Local authorities will also need to show far more willingness to compromise than they have shown. At this point in time, something needs to give, and it is teachers and young people who are losing out unless we can come to some kind of agreement.

16:11

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I do not know what kind of crazy logic leads to the conclusion that cutting £145.5 million from local authority budgets will protect teacher numbers. Local authorities will have to respond to that if their funds are cut even further. How do they balance the books? The Scottish Government knows that local authorities are under tight financial constraints, so there will have to be a reaction.

Jenny Gilruth: I find it hard to follow Mr Rennie's logic. As we have heard today, we have had two years of consecutive reductions in teacher numbers, but the Government has not acted to claw back funding. We are now going into year 3. Willie Rennie will recall that, earlier this year, I said, "Let us not fund in this way in the future. Let us fund through a grant process, which, up front, asks local authorities to agree to maintain teacher numbers." However, they refused to do that.

To Mr Greer's point about consensus and trying to work with local authorities—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, cabinet secretary—

Jenny Gilruth: That is exactly what I have been doing since February to get funding out the door. Local authorities will not agree to it. Some of them want the funding, and they want to cut—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly—

Jenny Gilruth: Is that a position that Mr Rennie supports?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you some of the time back, Mr Rennie.

Willie Rennie: The Scottish Government is working on a misunderstanding. The education

secretary seems to think that local authorities, including SNP-run Glasgow City Council, are hellbent on destroying Scottish education. Why on earth does she think that? If the Westminster Government were treating the Scottish Government as she is treating local authorities, there would be an outcry.

Where is the Verity house agreement? Where is the historic concordat where local authorities are supposed to be working in partnership with central Government, when we are now regularly issuing threats because, somehow, local authorities cannot be trusted with our education system?

The cabinet secretary has really destroyed the relationship with local authorities and schools. The people who are paying the price are teachers, because there is complete incoherence in the Scottish Government's position. There are promises about, and difficulties in, recruiting 3,500 extra teachers, partly to cut teacher contact time by 90 minutes and—it has been in the commentary—about making sure that there are more permanent places and cutting temporary contracts. However, none of that has been done.

I understand the cabinet secretary's problem, but to think that local authorities are the problem in the relationship, rather than the funding that she is providing to local authorities, is a complete misunderstanding of the issue. Ross Greer is bang on about that point; he highlighted the fact that the money does not have the same value as it used to have. Inflation and pay deals have gone through the roof, which has affected the money in a way that John Swinney said in May was an issue. Indeed, he said that we

"live in the real world".—[*Official Report*, 9 May 2024; c 13.]

The education secretary is not living in the real world, and she is expecting local authorities to live not in the real world but in her world, where she is able to regularly issue threats about funding. Her position is illogical.

There is also a problem with what is happening to the pipeline of teachers. We know that there has not been the recruitment of an extra 3,500 teachers, yet the pipeline continues from initial teacher education. Teachers are coming into the primary education world in particular thinking that there will be a job for them, but the Scottish Government has not provided the funding that is necessary for them to be employed.

The education secretary is not living in the real world, but these teachers are expected to live in the real world without a job or an opportunity or without a permanent contract for years on end. I think that the education secretary knows that I am right about this; she knows that she has an incoherent position, where she is expecting local authorities to live within an incredibly tight financial

budget but deliver the promises that were made in her party's manifesto back in 2021. She is incoherent and she needs to sort this out—otherwise schools, teachers and local authorities will continue to suffer.

16:15

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The whole problem with the £145 million is that there is, frankly, no specific agreement about how that money will be spent. I have asked that question a hundred times. I have asked to see the documentation that goes with the agreement on the £145 million, but it has never been produced, because it does not exist.

I will use my time to address the impending crisis in the Falkirk Council area. The council is proposing to cut the school week due to SNP funding cuts, which would mean less time in the classroom for children to learn. It is axiomatic that the more time that children spend learning in the classroom, the better it is. Falkirk Council's proposals would remove the equivalent of a full year's teaching from children and young people, and I am completely opposed to those proposals, as are many parents and pupils across Falkirk who have been contacting me and pressing the issue. It is an urgent issue for them and it is causing great anxiety. Falkirk Council needs to drop that ridiculous plan.

If we sit here long enough and listen to Government ministers going through their register of excuses, we find a theme. It goes like this: "That has nothing to do with us. These matters are in the hands of local authorities. There would be outrage if we did anything." That is a typical response from members on the Government front bench. On this issue, that response is especially disingenuous because the reason why councils such as Falkirk are thinking of taking the drastic step of cutting the school week is that they have not been properly funded by the SNP Government for more than a decade. We are now in the 18th year of an SNP Government, so the SNP can no longer pass the buck for the mess that it has created. It must take responsibility.

Given what we have put the children and young people of Scotland through over the past few years, the last thing that we should be doing is reducing the school week. We should not be cutting back on their education; we should be investing in their education. We should not be cutting teacher numbers or sticking newly qualified teachers on disposable temporary contracts; we should be reducing classroom sizes and widening subject choice. We should be empowering school leaders, but, given the cabinet secretary's poor track record, I fear that nothing will change. Willie

Rennie is right—the cabinet secretary is living in a parallel universe, not in the real world.

Barely a few weeks ago, we passed motions that called on the Government to reverse its position on a couple of issues, including one related to education. The SNP ministers have just ignored the passing of those motions. That is why, when I saw the amendment in the cabinet secretary's name, I burst out laughing. The amendment refers to a vote of this Parliament, but those ministers could not care less about the votes of this Parliament. Such is the contempt that the SNP has for this Parliament, and such is the general apathy towards the proceedings of this Parliament, that they calculate that they can get away with it. So, here we are again, debating Scottish education thanks to a Scottish Conservative motion.

There is a reason why the Scottish Conservatives are passionate about education and why we feel so strongly that the burden of Government spending cuts should never fall on classrooms. We believe in creating greater equality of opportunity right across our country, and education and skills training are the golden ticket to accessing a lifetime of opportunity. If it really needs to be explained to members of the SNP Government how awful the consequences of cutting the school week would be for children and young people, their prospects and their families, the ministers frankly do not deserve to sit where they sit a day longer. They are failing Scotland, they are failing our children and young people and their futures, and they are failing the future of Scotland. The cabinet secretary should desist from the sort of grandstanding and posturing that we have heard from her in the debate. It is writ large in her amendment.

Jenny Gilruth: Look in the mirror!

Stephen Kerr: You can hold up a mirror, if you like.

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

Stephen Kerr: I am the Opposition and you are the Government. If you cannot do the job, you should remove yourselves. You should act to ensure that school hours in Scotland are protected.

16:20

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): As I am following Willie Rennie and Stephen Kerr, I might, for once, try to take the heat out of the debate—there is a first time for everything. Perhaps I can bring us back to talking about education and how we can move forward with that.

I have been a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee in its many guises, on and off, for most of my time in the Parliament, and I wondered why that was the case. At the committee meeting this morning, Professor Hayward spoke about her report on the future of education in Scotland, and that is when I had an idea of why I enjoy working on the committee. It is because it is about how we can make a difference, how we can deal with challenges and how we can put forward the arguments. For us to do that, we all have to do it collectively. We need to take the heat out of the debate, and we need to take the politics out of it and find a way forward so that we can all have a discussion.

The basis of the debate is the fact that the Government offered £145 million for the retention and recruitment of teachers. As the cabinet secretary has said, that was not happening over a two or three-year period, so the Government said, "Let's find another way of working." The briefing from COSLA that we received ahead of the debate says that COSLA would be quite happy to work with the Government to find a solution.

One of the things that I found interesting in the committee's meeting with Professor Hayward was that, when we are all talking about how to reform education, there are so many players and stakeholders in the sector that it is difficult to take everyone with you. Peter Bain also gave evidence at this morning's meeting, and he said that there are two types of parents in the world—those who had a very good experience of education and those who had a bad experience of it. In saying that, he summed up me and my wife. I will leave it to members to work out which one had the good experience of education.

I love talking about these things because it is so important that we find a solution and a way forward together with young people in Scotland. I take on board what Miles Briggs said earlier about wanting to work with others to reform education and find solutions, because that is what we need to do. That is what the public want us to do.

Mr Rennie is very entertaining when he makes a speech—there might be an opening for him at Blackpool central pier during the summer—but we have to take the heat out of the debate. We need to talk about what people and parents want to hear about. That is a question that I have always asked when we have been going through the process of education reform. Parents are very important in education, and we need to bring them with us on our ideas. For parents and for the SNP, it is always about ensuring that we have the teacher numbers. The SNP and the Scottish Government have always pushed for that, and that is the whole point of the position that we are in now. We are

looking at ways to work with local government to ensure that we get the teacher numbers.

On the committee, I find myself agreeing with Mr Greer more often than not, because we seem to have a meeting of minds on these things, and I agree with him on many of the issues that he brought up in his speech. It is about everybody sitting down and talking about how we can move forward. It is about delivery.

I cannot help being the way that I am. If I see a problem, I want to fix it. If something is broken, I want to ensure that it is fixed. I just cannot stop being that person. Sometimes, we need to take a look at ourselves and what we are saying in debates. It is great to have showpiece debates in which we can get a press headline, but the important thing for me is delivery for the children of Scotland. It is time for us to take the heat out of the debate, talk about the issues sensibly and move forward.

16:24

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): This disagreement between COSLA and the Scottish Government has been going on since February. It is disappointing that the Government has not resolved the issue and that schools will continue to miss out on funding. The Scottish Government now faces twin crises of its own making: a failure to retain and expand teacher numbers, despite its promise to do so, and the results of years of local authority underfunding.

In May, this Parliament voted to recognise the precarity in the teaching profession today. For too long, teachers have been running on good will. Research that the Educational Institute of Scotland published in June found that far too many teachers are working beyond their contracted hours and are reporting increasing stress and decreasing job satisfaction.

Many local authorities are struggling to fill posts at all. Data from the teacher induction scheme shows that only 66 per cent of council requests for probationers were fulfilled and that fewer than half of the required number of maths and computing probationary teachers were being delivered to local authorities. Those figures are made worse when we consider that fewer than a third of post-induction scheme teachers move into full-time employment. The Scottish teachers for permanence campaign group also states that we have thousands of teachers who want to work but are being denied the opportunity or are facing long waits on supply lists before gaining temporary employment.

Clearly, the current strategy is not delivering. We need regular publication of clear data that shows where we need more teachers and how

many are on supply lists, and a workforce plan to address the staffing gaps in all areas of our schools.

The consistent underfunding of local authorities has also contributed to the dispute. Even if funding is released to retain teachers, as the Scottish Government has requested, other areas of education may face cuts. Additional support for learning, bus travel to and from school, and the length of the school week are all in danger. Funding for all of those things comes from core local government budgets, which have been disproportionately cut in the past 10 years, and COSLA has noted that there has been a cut of £63 million to the core revenue budget in 2023-24. Local government financing will remain an issue regardless of the outcome of the dispute.

The Scottish Government must work urgently to resolve this conflict with local authorities and publish a workforce plan to resolve the longer-term issues in the teaching profession, as was called for by this Parliament in May.

16:28

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

This morning, I was privileged to become the convener of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, taking over from my colleague Sue Webber, who did a great job for two and a half years. My new role has had a profound and almost immediate impact, because I have found myself sitting here agreeing almost entirely with two of my new colleagues, Willie Rennie and Ross Greer. I hope that that bodes well for the deliberations that we will have in the committee—although my saying that might not bode well for either of them.

However, I do not agree with every committee member. George Adam, who mentioned earlier that we met this morning, said that he wanted to take the heat out of the debate, but I think that there has to be heat in the debate. If we cannot get passionate and inspired about the education of our children and young people across Scotland, we should not be here. Of course, as Stephen Kerr said, the reason why we are here is that the Scottish Conservatives have again chosen to use our debating time in the chamber to focus on education. I took some comfort from the cabinet secretary saying that she will hold a debate on the issue in Government time, but we need to debate it far more in the chamber.

Just this week, we saw the Scottish teachers for permanence campaign group on our news channels. That issue is rising up the political agenda and the news agenda because it affects all our constituencies and all 32 local authorities.

In my time today, I will focus on my local authority—Moray Council. I spoke with the council leader, Kathleen Robertson, the education team and council officers to get some background on the situation that parents in Moray face, and that the community faces. In Moray, we have 54 schools educating 12,000 pupils. The budget for education is 40 per cent of Moray Council's total budget, and 80 per cent of that goes on staffing. That means that, when the Scottish Government withholds money from Moray Council and other local authorities, it has an immediate and significant impact on our teachers, our pupils, our schools and the education system locally and nationally.

We have had significant problems with recruiting teachers in subjects including technical studies and home economics, but that has now extended to mathematics and English. We are struggling to recruit teachers across the board. Indeed, in some of our schools, pupils are going an entire session without there being a full complement of teachers in particular subjects. Not only is that having an impact on the pupils, but it obviously has a significant impact on the teachers who remain, who are having to pick up an awful lot of the slack.

According to Moray Council, there has been an increase in the number of referrals to occupational health for stress, anxiety and depression, which are the key reasons for teacher absence in Moray. We need to do something about that, not only for the generation who are being taught but for our teachers who are struggling, many of whom are at breaking point. That is why today's debate is important, and it is why we need more than we have heard so far from the cabinet secretary, who said that we are pitting local government against central Government. We need them to work together to come up with a solution that delivers for everyone.

In my final seconds, I will focus on another issue that I have raised many times. People who are coming from England with qualifications cannot immediately get into education in Scotland. We have an Army barracks and a Royal Air Force base where many of the spouses were trained in England and have qualifications but they cannot get into teaching because they cannot get accreditation from the General Teaching Council for Scotland for 190 days. We have a strange situation in which, on Wednesdays, Moray pupils often go from high schools to the University of the Highlands and Islands Moray to be taught by a lecturer who is not accredited with the GTCS, yet if that lecturer was to come into a classroom in a Moray school, they would have to be accompanied by someone with that accreditation. I hope that we can discuss that issue more with the cabinet secretary, because it is one of the areas where we could make improvements in Moray.

16:32

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): I welcome Douglas Ross and Miles Briggs to their new positions.

Contributions from colleagues have shown that the situation is challenging. If we zoom out, we see that the number of teachers in Scotland has risen by 8 per cent since 2014 and that, despite a profoundly challenging financial situation, the Scottish Government is providing a record £14 billion settlement for local government in 2024-25, which represents a real-terms increase of 2.5 per cent compared with last year. Despite that, however, it is clear that changes are needed that go far beyond funding. The situation is difficult, and a more complicated picture emerges when we break down teacher training and recruitment figures, as members have mentioned.

Primary teacher education courses usually hit or exceed their targets. However, that has led to an oversupply, and many primary teachers are struggling to obtain a permanent contract. The picture is different for secondary teachers. Recruitment for the postgraduate diploma in education is much lower. Some subjects face more acute challenges than others. This year, Scotland's 32 local authorities requested 117 technological education probationers but received only 39. For maths, 164 probationer teachers were requested but only 71 were allocated.

Secondary teacher shortages lead to subjects being cut, which reduces pupils' subject choice. Lower teacher numbers lead to more stressful working conditions for teachers and may result in more people leaving the profession, which is not what we want. That also puts strain on others who stay. Research that has been carried out in England suggests that a lack of good promotion prospects and job security is a key factor in leading those who are considering careers in teaching ultimately to decide against it. We should develop an understanding of the factors that are at play in Scotland so that we can address the undersupply of secondary school teachers.

Some measures have been put in place, such as the preference waiver scheme through which probationers agree to be placed at a school anywhere in Scotland and they receive a payment as an incentive. I welcome the Government's commitment to taking greater care to allocate those probationers to the areas of greatest need, but the numbers of preference waiver probationers are dropping. I call on the Government to carry out research to better understand why that is the case. Given the pressure on housing in many areas of Scotland and the high cost of living, it is perhaps not surprising that fewer people feel comfortable about taking that leap of faith. Concrete data on

that would allow for targeted measures to tackle the root cause of that drop.

The importance of the role that teachers play in our society cannot be overstated. Despite best intentions, there is room for improvement, and I call on the Government to explore a more flexible and collaborative approach to training, recruitment and retention.

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

16:36

Ross Greer: Yesterday, it was Liz Smith and Willie Rennie agreeing with me; today, it is Douglas Ross and Willie Rennie. All that I can say is that I am glad that my party conference was last weekend rather than the coming weekend, or the notoriously restless membership might be proposing a motion of censure. However, there is something constructive and positive about our ability, particularly in yesterday's debate on fiscal sustainability and on some of the points that have been made today, to begin to identify areas of consensus.

The core issue that we are dealing with in this debate is an unresolved tension that has continued for the 25 years of this Parliament's existence, which is that education is considered a national issue and the Scottish Government is judged on issues such as teacher numbers, but it is our local authorities that deliver education and are the employers of those who work in our schools. No party, including mine, has proposed an obvious way to resolve that. I would certainly not support the complete centralisation of education—I do not think that any of us would want to see a situation in which this Parliament had nothing to do with education—but we are in that messy point in the middle where such conflicts emerge.

There is a democratic point here as well. I want £145 million to be used to recruit and retain teachers in our schools, but I also respect that local authority elected representatives have just as much democratic legitimacy as I do, and they are the employers of those who work in our schools. There is obviously a tension between those two positions.

On this specific conflict, as I said earlier, I think that compromise is possible. As much as I recognise that the cabinet secretary cannot have discussions with COSLA through the medium of me, I would like her to respond in her closing speech to my suggestion about maintaining spend rather than maintaining head count, and to say whether that is a potential area for discussion, at the very least.

The Green amendment that was not selected for this debate would have taken it into the grounds of local government finance, which is core to why we are here. That is one of the many consequences of this Parliament having failed for 25 years to reform local government finances in Scotland. It is not normal to have a tier of government that raises only about 20 per cent of its funding. We talk a lot about Scotland aspiring to be a normal European country, but it is normal for European local government to be able to raise a majority—at least half—of its funds. That is not the case here in Scotland.

There are a range of steps that we could have taken and could still take. Most obvious is that, at the very least, we should be revaluing council tax. We would not tax people's income on the basis of what it was 34 years ago, but we seem to believe that it is appropriate to do that with council tax. We should let councils fully set the rates and bands rather than just being able to set band D and having everything else locked in around that. Ideally, we should replace the council tax. It was not the right system in the first place and it is certainly not fit for purpose now.

We should give local authorities far more powers to raise revenue or not—we should give them the option of using those powers if they wish. The Greens have also put forward proposals for a carbon emission land tax, a demolition levy and a stadium levy. We believe that, ultimately, councils should have a power of general competence to do that for themselves, but we accept that that will not happen immediately to resolve the issue.

I urge the Scottish Government to show some good will to COSLA, frustrating as that organisation can often be. I am not usually COSLA's greatest defender, but there is a need for dialogue on funding for schools, the national care service and the council tax freeze, outwith the annual budget process. That is all that COSLA has asked for at this point. I encourage the cabinet secretary to show it some good faith and I ask that she, the First Minister or the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government agrees to engage in those discussions so that we can move this forward. We should not be in a situation where we are simply waiting to see who blinks first on a question as important as how our schools are funded and how many teachers are in our classrooms.

16:40

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a pleasure, on behalf of Scottish Labour, to close this debate on education, which has, again, been brought to the chamber by an Opposition party. I welcome Miles Briggs to his new responsibilities and wish him well with those. I also extend my

congratulations to Douglas Ross on his elevation to convener of the Education, Children and Young People Committee.

This interesting debate has captured, if not the minutiae of what is so important about the issue, the field on which it is being played. Evelyn Tweed gave a very thoughtful contribution on the realities of what is happening. I found it particularly poignant to think of our COSLA colleagues requesting 117 technological education probationers, which is one of the hardest areas to recruit into, and receiving only 39.

Douglas Ross, particularly in his comments about Moray, articulately expressed the challenge of what it is like—I will use an old-fashioned phrase—on the chalkface. The reality is that our local authorities and our high schools and primary schools are facing enormous challenges. In debates in this chamber on a number of occasions, we have rehearsed—and certainly articulated—the challenges from violence in schools and the challenge of teachers seeking help for their own mental health, as a result of dealing with the mental health of their pupils, which they feel responsible for but are ill-equipped to deal with at times.

The complexities that young people are bringing into schools have never been faced in the education system before. Families are facing enormous challenges. Many members have spoken about the challenge of cutting core local authority funding, as doing so cuts the services that surround a school and enable it to carry out its function: to educate our young people.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I do not want to dismiss concerns about the issue in any way, but does Martin Whitfield recognise that local authorities have reserves? Indeed, the Accounts Commission believes that the target for local authorities is to have between 2 per cent and 4 per cent of unearmarked reserves in the general fund. Labour-run North Lanarkshire Council in my area has 16 per cent—£39 million—of unearmarked reserves in its general fund. The amount across the whole of Scotland is £480 million.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly.

Clare Adamson: Could not local authorities access further funds from those reserves?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Martin Whitfield. [*Interruption.*] I can give you back some of that time.

Martin Whitfield: I apologise for cutting across you, Deputy Presiding Officer. Time is incredibly tight in this debate on education that was brought by the Conservatives. Yes, there are reserves. I heard an interesting fact this morning—this applies

to health—that an integration joint board's entire reserves have been used up.

That is part of the argument, and I do not want to discount it. However, it also speaks to the other issue that I wish to raise. Oh, this means that I will have to begrudgingly agree with Ross Greer again. However, I will do so with a certain level of enthusiasm on this occasion. He articulated one side of the argument that people outside Parliament sometimes find challenging to understand or even to be aware of: the tension that exists between COSLA and this Scottish Government.

I say this in the kindest terms possible, but some of the contributions from front-bench members when Mr Greer was talking about that reflect the challenge that we have. I do not know the number of debates that I have been in when we have been asked to work together and told that, if we could only just agree, we could get the matter sorted.

Ross Greer has rightly pointed out one of the great challenges. There is a breakdown in communication. Sometimes, it is very challenging for individuals to accept that that is the case. However, if that can be accepted, that allows for the possibility that, when people sit in a room together, an agreement can be made.

I am disappointed about the shortness of this debate, although I fully understand that it was for very good reason. I will leave it there, Deputy Presiding Officer.

16:44

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Miles Briggs for bringing this hugely important topic to the chamber. It has been an interesting debate, at times, and I want to respond to points that were raised. However, I will start by reminding members that, in 2021, every single MSP in the chamber stood on a manifesto commitment to increase teacher numbers. We all made promises to the people who elected us.

I was in Willie Rennie's constituency this morning, in the real world, talking to one of his real-life constituents. She has been impacted by the employment practices of a local authority, which, last year, took funding from central Government and cut teacher numbers anyway. The incoherence in his logic is simply breathtaking, particularly given that he stood for election in 2021 on a commitment to "boost the teaching workforce", to quote the Liberal Democrat manifesto.

I turn to Stephen Kerr and parallel universes. I do not think that he has done his homework. He is huffing, he is puffing and he wants action. For his understanding, I do not agree with any proposals

to reduce the school working week or school hours. Had he attempted to show his working, he would know that I have been clear that, should any local authority in Scotland propose to reduce school working hours, the Scottish Government would introduce regulation to protect learning hours and learning outcomes as a result. I give him the reassurance that that power rests with Scottish ministers.

George Adam spoke about the need for less heat and more light. I agree with Ross Greer that we need to move forward, and I think that the issue is the one that he alludes to in relation to the national care service and the council tax freeze, as well as the wider issues that Stephen Kerr alluded to in relation to learning hours. I suppose that, to some extent, that is also part of Willie Rennie's argument, which seemed to be that funding should flow to local authorities irrespective of other issues. Again, I remind members of the COSLA briefing from December 2022, which showed that local authorities planned cuts of up to 8,000 to teacher numbers. Had the Scottish Government not taken direct action at the time, we would be in a far more challenging position now. It is because of that ring-fenced allocation and the protection of that spending that we have been able to maintain and increase teacher numbers by more than 2,000 compared with 2018.

Foysoyl Choudhury talked to longer-term issues in relation to the teaching profession. I recognise that time is tight, but it is worth while putting on the record some thoughts in relation to the Conservative motion, which also talked to issues that are associated with workload. I met EIS representatives only yesterday to talk about a substantive independent report that it published, which looked at challenges with regard to teacher workload post-pandemic. We need a renewed drive on reducing unnecessary teacher workload. We know that, in some schools, that is leading to burnout. Our trade union colleagues have undertaken substantive work on that issue, and I committed to work on that with EIS and our professional trade union associations, which represent our teaching workforce.

A key part of the challenge in relation to workload is reducing class contact time. I have committed to working with urgency on the issue with the trade unions. As I am sure that council colleagues know, it will not be possible to reduce class contact time by having fewer teachers in our schools.

Douglas Ross made a number of really interesting points, not least in relation to his constituency and GTCS accreditation. He knows that I have a soft spot for Moray, having completed my probation year at Elgin high school some years ago, and I am happy to commit to working with

him and the GTCS on what more we might be able to do in that space.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to hear the cabinet secretary agreeing with Douglas Ross—[*Inaudible.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have Liz Smith's mic on, please?

Liz Smith: —a very good speech. I must say that Mary Scanlon, one of our former colleagues, made the very same point nine years ago, and nothing has happened. Will the cabinet secretary undertake to ensure that it does happen?

Jenny Gilruth: My answer to Liz Smith's point is yes. I have made that commitment today to Mr Ross—it is on the record. I am happy to also work with her on the issue. However, nine years ago, I was perhaps still in a classroom myself.

Douglas Ross hit on the solution, which is, in essence, how we can work with COSLA to reach a resolution to get the funding out the door. The First Minister and I have committed to exactly that, most recently in correspondence only last week.

I am conscious of time, Presiding Officer. I am asking members to unite behind the Government's simple one-line amendment, which asks us to make clear that the £145.5 million that is being made available by the Scottish Government should be accepted by local government. It should be used to protect teacher numbers in order to improve outcomes for all of Scotland's children. I hope that all the parties can unite behind the amendment in my name.

16:50

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. Although the line-up may have changed, the salient points that have been made in the contributions from my colleagues are as important and pertinent now as they were when they were made under the excellent stewardship of my colleagues Liam Kerr and Sue Webber.

Again, the Scottish Conservatives are using their time in the chamber to highlight the issues—or, should I say, failings—surrounding education in Scotland. It is a fundamental Conservative belief that education is the key to every person going on to achieve their full potential. However, I would go further. Not only is education a powerful thing, but it is power—power in one's self, power that comes from understanding and belief, power in one's own ability to work through life's problems, power in the job market, power that knowledge will provide a secure future and power that comes from knowing that you can do whatever you set your mind to. It is a gift. It is hope. It is potential. It is the bedrock

and foundation of all the changes that we need in our society.

So why has the Scottish National Party Government failed on education? The cabinet secretary consistently contributes to debates by highlighting the amount of money spent but ignoring the lack of tangible results. For the money spent, we should be seeing rapid changes in literacy and numeracy, but that is simply not happening. It is not correct to say that attainment is improving, because it is stagnant at best. The dial has barely moved and it is moving in the wrong direction. It is not correct to say that that is solely down to poverty. As we know, education is the most tried and tested route out of poverty, and it is a lever that we are not pulling.

The cabinet secretary talks of maintaining teacher numbers but, when cash-strapped councils are left with no option but to cut teacher numbers in the first place and are then penalised by the withholding of £145 million, that all but secures an increase in cuts in other priorities that the Government is trying to avoid. SNP members are good at asking what cuts should be made, so I wonder whether they would be willing to advise our local authorities just where the cuts should come from. Would a reduction in ASN staff be preferable? What about early intervention specialists or social workers?

Jenny Gilruth: I am trying to listen to the member's logic, but it is the case that a number of local authorities have maintained teacher numbers in the past year and some have increased them. We know that. The member is outlining the political choices that are being made by certain local authorities that believe that I should allow them to have the funding and to cut. Is that a position that the Conservatives support?

Roz McCall: No. What I am saying is that, if local authorities are looking at cutting teacher numbers, which they are, and the Government is highlighting that it is going to withhold the funds, the only thing that can be done is to make cuts elsewhere if they keep teacher numbers the same.

I will add to a couple of contributions that have been made. I look forward to working with Miles Briggs, and I welcome his comments on literacy and phonics. I note the commitment from the cabinet secretary to bring that issue to the chamber for discussion, and I look forward to that.

Ross Greer and Willie Rennie mentioned the Verity house agreement. COSLA's briefing for today highlighted that the £145.5 million will not fully support teacher numbers. The pay deal for 2024-25 means that local government needs to contribute £135 million, while the Scottish Government needs to contribute £43 million to meet the cost of the pay awards. There is an

argument that the money will not maintain teacher numbers anyway. It is difficult for me to accept that the cabinet secretary can use the autonomy-for-local-authorities card as and when it suits, but not in this case.

We had an excellent contribution from Stephen Kerr. I think that passion in education is imperative, and I do not think that he was huffing. I disagree with George Adam—we should not be taking the fire out of this debate; we should be increasing the passion, increasing the drive to make change and increasing the prospects for children in Scotland.

Our teachers go to work hoping to impart their love of their subject to children, but most teachers and school staff in Scotland are witnesses to and are subjected to considerable instances of negative behaviour. According to a report on behaviour in Scottish schools back at the end of 2023, two thirds of staff had encountered general verbal abuse, almost three in five had encountered physical aggression and more than two in three had experienced physical violence between pupils in the classroom in the previous week. I refer to that report on purpose. An EIS branch report that came out in January 2024 backed up those findings. It stated:

“‘Violence and aggression’ is an urgent issue within Scotland’s schools, with incidents being experienced every week in over three-quarters of schools, and daily in many. Most schools reported that the amount of ‘violence and aggression’, including prejudice based violence, had grown in the last four years”.

What have we had from the Scottish Government in relation to that appalling working environment for our teachers? We have had a plan that was built on a plan that was based on a consultation, which has done precisely nothing. We are a full year on from the reports that I mentioned, and our teachers are still subjected to increasing levels of violence.

Our teachers are struggling. They need support. They need working conditions that will allow them to do their job. They need secure and permanent employment. They need to be able to trust that their local authority’s education department is equipped and adequately funded, and that it will work in partnership with them to empower the children in their charge.

We should be empowering our teachers to take control of the curriculum in their classroom. They should be able to experiment with different teaching methods that ignite interest. We should be delegating powers down to our headteachers, so that they have more control—including financial control—over their schools. What we do not need is a Scottish Government that hands out detention when local authorities step out of line.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on funding for teachers and schools in Scotland. Before we move on to the next item of business, there will be a brief pause to allow front-bench members to change places.

Economic Growth (Support)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-15061, in the name of Craig Hoy, on using the upcoming Scottish budget to support economic growth. I call Craig Hoy to speak to and move the motion.

We need a microphone for Mr Hoy, please. *[Interruption.]* It seems that Mr Hoy's card is not in. Could you try taking your card out and putting it back in, Mr Hoy? That is the trusted old method of solving technological problems. *[Interruption.]* We will provide Mr Hoy with a spare card. Apologies, Mr Hoy.

16:59

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): It is a case of second time lucky, Deputy Presiding Officer.

Today's budget was the moment to discover whether leopards have the capacity to change their spots. We have known for a decade and more that the Scottish National Party is reckless on the economy—reckless on tax, reckless on spending and reckless on business, all of which adds up to being reckless on growth. Today, Scotland has discovered that Labour is just as bad, with a reckless budget of broken promises.

The budget included a massive increase in tax—the biggest ever increase in a single budget; a massive increase in borrowing; a £25 billion jobs tax on employers; a financial ram-raid on Scotland's vital oil and gas sector; higher tax on Scotch whisky; a tax assault on farmers and their families; and a cash grab on Scotland's pensioners, who now face the prospect of freezing this winter.

In votes in this chamber, Labour and the SNP are frequently on the same page on matters such as gender reform, hate crime legislation and rent controls, but we now find that they are on the same page in the budget playbook. However, it is the wrong page and the wrong playbook because it contains more tax and more borrowing and, at the same time, cuts to key public services. All those measures are intended to fund misplaced priorities, including above-inflation pay deals, which were demanded by their friends and donors in the trade union movement.

Today, Scotland is suffering a double whammy at the hands of a cosy left-wing consensus between Labour and the SNP and their friends in the Greens. They are socialists doing what socialists do—clobbering hard-pressed taxpayers, beleaguered businesses and vulnerable pensioners.

Our motion today makes it clear that the Scottish Government has failed to deliver sustained levels of economic growth in Scotland. If it had succeeded, the finance secretary would have had an additional £624 million to spend on public services in this year alone. The Scottish economy would have been £11 billion better off in recent times if only Scottish growth had kept pace with growth in the rest of the United Kingdom.

However, rather than boosting business, this SNP Government has repeatedly put barriers in its way. For too long, Scotland has been a high-tax, low-growth economy with public services that are simply not fit for purpose. The SNP's misplaced priorities have led to billions in waste. Public sector pay has soared while unreformed public services have suffered. For example, the two lifeline ferries, which are costing nearly half a billion pounds, have yet to take a single passenger to our forgotten islands. Hundreds of millions of pounds are wasted on pet projects, and millions more are wasted on abandoned or ill-fated legal challenges.

Ministers insist that their approach to tax is progressive, but what on earth is progressive about slapping more tax on someone who earns £29,000 a year? That is a tax on nurses, teachers and police officers—not a tax on the rich.

The Scottish ministers have increased income tax on hard-working Scots by more than £1.4 billion since 2016, but the vast majority of that tax revenue has not been generated by their newfangled rates of tax. It has come from freezing thresholds—a sleekit fiscal sleight of hand.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives are now asking the Scottish Government to examine the benefits of lowering tax in Scotland and to explore how we can apply common sense to tax in order to generate jobs and drive economic growth.

The tax gap between Scotland and the rest of the UK has stifled growth. It has prevented us from attracting and retaining key workers, such as national health service doctors and dentists, and it is undermining the financial services sector. Scottish Financial Enterprise warns that its members are finding it more difficult to attract and retain senior workers, and recruitment firms say that candidates are now asking for a Scottish weighting on their salaries to make up for the tax difference.

Fiscal drag has pulled more and more Scots into higher tax, but it is an escalator that, under the SNP, goes only one way—always up, never down—forcing more and more Scots to pay more in tax to fuel the SNP's insatiable appetite to spend other people's money and, frequently, to do so unwisely.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Craig Hoy: I will not give way.

Thanks to the union dividend, this year, Scotland has £2,400 more per head to spend on public services. However, although the SNP still adopts a policy of higher tax on the majority of Scottish workers, our NHS fails to meet waiting time targets; qualified teachers cannot find permanent jobs; school standards have slumped; violent crime is rising; dangerous prisoners are being released early; Police Scotland is on the brink, with the threat of large-scale redundancies; cash-strapped councils are being forced to slash services; and our roads and infrastructure are crumbling. At the same time, the SNP is cutting investment in housing and employability, but the benefits bill is still soaring.

The SNP is not just on the wrong page—it is on a different planet. It gave free mobile phones to prisoners but slashed funding to get people back into work. It is sending millions of pounds to educate children in Africa—noble as that is—but funding for teachers in Scotland is not being delivered.

However, Labour is no better. In fact, today, we found out that it might be worse. Make no mistake whatsoever—Labour's budget is bad for Scotland, despite the additional Barnett consequentials that will come forward. It is bad for workers, bad for growth and bad for the economy. Labour promised change, but the country did not expect that it would be change for the worse through higher borrowing, which will put mortgages at risk—

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): For goodness' sake. Will Mr Hoy take an intervention?

Craig Hoy: I do not have time.

Labour claims to be investing in growth but, at the same time, it risks undermining growth through a stealth tax on jobs. The national insurance tax rate that was announced today will halt investment and stifle growth, and it could force Scottish firms to close altogether. It jeopardises pay rises in the private sector and will cost jobs.

Let us take hospitality across Scotland as an example. Many pubs are staring into the abyss. The SNP has let down the sector time and again, particularly and most recently in relation to rates relief. Wages are the sector's biggest cost, so hitting it with a jobs tax is bad not just for the sector but for the economy and growth in Scotland.

Labour and the SNP have proved that they cannot be trusted to grow the Scottish economy. It is increasingly clear that there is only one party that businesses can trust, only one party that is

standing up for pensioners, only one party that is standing up for Scottish taxpayers and workers and only one party that is standing up for growth in Scotland. That is the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party. Between now and the next election, we will work to unite people and businesses that have been let down badly by both Governments and their lamentable budgets. That is why I encourage colleagues to support the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the Scottish Government has failed to deliver sustained levels of economic growth in Scotland; notes that this failure has cost Scotland's public services £624 million in 2022-23 alone; recognises that the Scottish Ministers have increased income tax on people in Scotland by over £1.4 billion since 2016 and have created a damaging tax differential with the rest of the UK; acknowledges that, despite increased taxes and higher spending on devolved public services, this has failed to deliver better outcomes for the taxpayers who fund these services, and calls on the Scottish Government to examine the potential positive impact on jobs and economic growth of beginning to lower tax in the upcoming Scottish Budget.

17:06

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): I am delighted to open for the Government on the second of our triple header of finance debates this week. I welcome the opportunity to debate the issues that the Conservative motion raises, following yesterday's interesting debate on fiscal sustainability. As I outlined yesterday, and as I reiterate today, the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that public finances are sustainable. Taxation and the economy are two of the three pillars that will ensure that that is delivered, alongside our approach to public spending. I will focus on those issues today.

Mr Hoy began by criticising our record on the economy. A top priority for the Government is boosting economic growth, which creates good jobs, supports investment in the green industries of the future, tackles poverty and sustains high-quality public services.

Let us look at our record. Mr Hoy and the Tories will be interested to learn that gross domestic product per capita in Scotland has grown faster than it has in the UK since 2007. It has grown by 10.7 per cent in Scotland compared with only 5.6 per cent across the UK as a whole—almost double. On top of that, over the same period, productivity has grown at an average annual rate of 1.1 per cent in Scotland compared with 0.4 per cent in the UK—more than double.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): If that is all true, why do only 9 per cent of Scottish

businesses have confidence in the Government's economic policy?

Ivan McKee: I will come on to talk about businesses and tax in a minute, as well as inward investment, which is an absolute measure of the confidence that businesses have in the Scottish economy.

The number of projects in Scotland grew, yet again, by almost 13 per cent last year, which was more than double the rate of growth across the UK. Indeed, that compares with a fall across the whole of Europe.

Scotland's position as a top-performing area of the UK outside of London in attracting international foreign direct investment has been maintained for the ninth year running. That is a real measure of the confidence of international businesses in how the Scottish economy is being run.

Since its launch, the Scottish National Investment Bank has committed almost £650 million and brought in a further £1.4 billion of third-party investment for businesses and projects across Scotland. That has enabled the building of affordable homes and has supported 1,800 jobs in investee businesses, and nearly 58,000 tonnes of carbon have been avoided as a result of the bank's investments.

The Government has set its sights clearly on establishing Scotland as one of Europe's leading start-up economies by fostering an environment where innovation and high-growth businesses flourish. Techscaler, the Scottish Government's £42 million national programme for creating, developing and scaling tech start-ups through education programmes, expert mentoring and a growing network of physical hubs, has had more than 1,000 applications from more than 900 individuals and 700 businesses accepted, and 36 per cent of them have women founders. Scotland's financial services sector, which Craig Hoy mentioned, is one of Europe's leading hubs for fintech start-ups and creating that excellent cluster, and it is a consequence of the work and focus on the part of the Scottish Government. It is difficult to characterise those as failures.

Craig Hoy talks about public sector work. I say to Mr Hoy that we are proud of the fact that we have more front-line staff—doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers—in Scotland than the average across the rest of the UK, and we are proud that we pay them a wage that is commensurate with their contribution to the Scottish economy.

Michael Marra: The minister is doing a good job of talking about growth opportunities for Scotland. Surely he will recognise and welcome the £125 million that was announced today for GB energy, which will be based in Aberdeen. Perhaps he could explain to us why SNP members of

Parliament refused to vote for that investment last night.

Ivan McKee: The Scottish Government is looking at the budget that Labour has introduced today to see what the implications of that are. The increase in national insurance in the public sector will have a significant £100 million impact on our budget, and that needs to be factored in. We have not seen Labour taking steps to cut the two-child cap—Labour has abandoned its principles there—and the misguided winter fuel payment policy is among many other errors in the UK Labour Government's approach in the past weeks and months.

Inward migration is another measure that shows the success of Scotland's economy. People are moving to Scotland. More taxpayers are coming to Scotland than have left.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is bringing his remarks to a close.

Ivan McKee: The numbers are increasing, and the number of those who are moving from the south to the north is higher than the number of those who are moving from Scotland to the rest of the UK, and the gap is growing, as was shown in the most recent publication of the data.

We believe that there is absolutely more work to be done to grow Scotland's economy, to create confidence and to encourage yet more investment, but the Government's track record over 17 years has many positives that we should be proud of. We will continue to work with businesses across Scotland to grow and strengthen Scotland's economy.

I move amendment S6M-15061.2, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert

"condemns the impact of the former UK Conservative administration's austerity and Brexit on the public finances and the wider economy; recognises that progressive taxation in Scotland has ensured that funding has been available to deliver actions to tackle poverty, like the Scottish Child Payment; notes that the latest available evidence shows that Scotland had positive net inward migration of taxpayers from the rest of the UK and was positive for every tax band; further notes that the process to develop the Scottish Budget for 2025-26 is underway; challenges those who would propose reducing tax rates to identify the public services that they would then cut to deliver the required balanced budget; deplores the call from the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party to introduce an illness tax in the form of prescription charges, and believes that the Baby Box, free prescriptions, free personal care, free eye examinations and free university tuition should be protected and sustained for the future."

17:12

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): For the Conservative Party in 2024 to bring to the chamber a motion to criticise financial policy is, in civil service speak, a bold move. We would almost think from Mr Hoy's remarks that a change in leadership and in the front bench means that this is somehow year zero for the Conservative Party, as if we had not gone through the misery of the past five years of a UK Conservative Government, given what that did to people's mortgages, the cost of living and everything else that went with it. Almost two centuries of perceived Tory fiscal competence were utterly destroyed when, in less than an hour, Kwasi Kwarteng and Liz Truss wiped £30 billion from the UK economy. I would have thought that the Tories would have preferred to avoid talking about their disastrous financial record in government, which even now has left us with a black hole of tens of billions of pounds. As I say, it is a bold move for the Tories to bring a debate on fiscal policy to the chamber.

However, let us not forget that another Government has also torpedoed any notion of financial credibility. The SNP has been in government for 17 years, but its incompetence, waste and apathy have hugely damaged Scotland's economy. What do we have to show for that SNP economy? We have £5 billion of waste. Local authority budgets have been cut by more than £6 billion. Nurses and teachers have been taxed more than they would have been if they were doing the same job in the rest of the UK, but the essential services that those taxes pay for are on their knees.

Ivan McKee: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Mark Griffin: I would normally, but the member has to appreciate that this is a very short debate.

If the SNP had managed to keep Scotland's economy in line with the economies of other parts of the UK, it would now be £8.5 billion larger.

I find it fascinating, however, that we now have a failed Tory Party calling out a failing SNP Government on finances, and that the Tories have not learned about the impact of prioritising unfunded tax cuts over efficiency and fairness in fiscal policy. We in the Labour Party will be getting on with fixing the horrendous mess that has been left behind.

Today, the Office for Budget Responsibility set out in fine detail the financial hole that the Tories drove us into with their incompetence and the mess that the UK Labour Government has inherited—a mess that has made some difficult choices necessary.

As the Prime Minister made clear on Monday, every single choice has been made to fix the foundations of our economy with working people in mind—people in Scotland and the rest of the UK, who have been working harder and harder but are still just standing still. Some of the choices are hard, but they will mean an employment bill that will finally make work pay, contribute to growth and raise living standards for working people. It will mean a direct response to the cost of living crisis that we were elected to tackle.

The budget will stabilise, invest in and grow the UK economy, with £63 billion-worth of investment secured from business two weeks ago creating tens of thousands of good-quality jobs in every corner of our country. It will also deliver the largest budget settlement for Scotland in the history of devolution with an extra £3.4 billion of funding. Labour is clearly delivering for Scotland.

Today's historic budget has shown that only Labour can get on with getting our economy back on track, boosting economic growth, ending austerity and making work pay.

I move amendment S6M-15061.1, to leave out from "the Scottish Ministers" to end and insert:

"while taxpayers in Scotland are paying more than their counterparts in the rest of the UK, almost one in six people in Scotland are on NHS waiting lists, the latest PISA statistics show that Scotland's education system is falling further behind other countries, and local government services are under severe financial pressure; believes that people are not seeing the necessary improvements to their public services; regrets that the incompetence of the Scottish National Party administration has led to chaos in the public finances, with emergency in-year budgets for three consecutive years, and calls on the Scottish Government to end 17 years of waste and incompetence in the management of Scotland's finances."

17:16

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): I note Mr Hoy's relentless focus on economic growth in his motion for debate today. Growth by itself is not inherently good, and cuts are not a means to growth in any case—Liz Truss demonstrated that very capably, I thought. Maximising growth for the sake of having a bigger gross domestic product to bang on the table than the country next door does not actually do anything at all to improve people's lives and can increase damage to the environment and greenhouse gas emissions, while making inequality worse—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please resume your seat, Ms Slater. We will hear the member who has the floor, which is Ms Slater, and none of the people who are making comments from a sedentary position. Please resume, Ms Slater.

Lorna Slater: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

It is making inequality worse by letting the rich get ever richer while most people get worse and worse off. Economic success needs to respect planetary boundaries and benefit the many, not just the few. No one needs a private jet or a yacht, but every child needs a warm home, a good school, access to good medical care and nutritious food.

Craig Hoy: I go back to the point about growth. Is the member therefore advocating that recession is good for the economy and good for the people of this country?

Lorna Slater: It is clear that Mr Hoy has not been listening to me. Growth for the sake of growth alone, just to get that bigger GDP number, will not solve any of those problems. We still need to redistribute wealth and invest in public services, and we can do that with the wealth that is already in the system. We cannot wait for some future date when we magically have a GDP number that will make the Conservative Party say, “Oh, today is the day we can finally invest in hospitals.” We will never reach that number, Mr Hoy—we need to start today.

I note Mr Hoy’s unevidenced assertion that the tax differential between England and Scotland is damaging. It is a pity that the *Torygraph*—I am sorry, I mean *The Telegraph*—did not get the memo and this weekend ran an article entitled “Why thousands are fleeing to Scotland—and why you should too”, which points out that net migration to Scotland from the rest of the UK hit 13,900 in the year to June 2023, which is the highest level recorded in 21 years.

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

Lorna Slater: No, I need to make progress.

Free university tuition, free prescriptions, free eye tests, free period products and free bus travel for young people are a bargain for the £111 in additional tax per year that someone on a £40,000 salary pays in Scotland. That article does not even mention the Scottish child payment, social care support, free school meals or higher pay for nurses.

The challenges of the past 14 years, with a Conservative Government in Westminster that has cut investment to the bone and run public services into the ground, highlight how unsatisfactory Scotland’s fiscal framework is. As a devolved nation, we have only limited tax and borrowing powers and end up having to use them to try to mitigate the worst of the vicious cuts and hardships that are being imposed from London.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission, among others, advocates for fiscal reconfiguration to avoid perpetually missing our climate and nature

restoration goals; and what about eliminating child poverty for good? We need more investment and money for those things, not less. Lowering taxes while continuing to subsidise polluting industries and large landowners will not achieve the outcomes that we desperately need.

The Scottish Greens want more public investment in Scotland, and we will be honest about where the money for it can come from and how it can be raised. In the Scottish budget, we would take funding from the road building and motorway expansion budgets and put it into housing and climate action. We would raise more from those who can afford it, such as those who travel by private jet.

I suggest to the Parliament that the focus should be on economic development, sustainability and prosperity for all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Slater, you need to bring your remarks to a close, please.

Lorna Slater: We have a national dashboard of wellbeing indicators. Let us put in place economic policy to improve those indicators and stop imagining that a twitch of our GDP number will make all our problems go away.

17:21

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): This is all great fun and there is a degree of political knockabout in it, but I am not sure that the debate is telling us a great deal that we do not already know. The reality is that growth in Scotland has been stymied by the decisions of both of Scotland’s Governments: the SNP’s failure to articulate a long-term vision has meant botched interventions and an erratic approach to tax and spend, and the Conservatives’ appalling legacy—Brexiteer and the Liz Truss mini-budget—are being felt by the whole country. People need hope and a fair deal.

We are all digesting today’s news from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I join others in recognising the history of this moment, that of the first budget delivered by a female chancellor in more than 800 years of that post.

We are glad that Rachel Reeves has listened to the Liberal Democrats’ calls for more investment in the NHS, because we cannot fix the economy unless we fix the health service and the care crisis around it. I am concerned that any additional spending that results from today’s UK budget will not make the impact that we need it to make here if the plan that underpins it—Scotland’s NHS recovery plan—is wholly flawed. We have record delayed discharge, people waiting years for mental health treatment, and dental deserts, with whole council areas where new patients are

unable to register with an NHS dentist. That is all interrupting the flow through our NHS, making waits longer and preventing people from getting back to work and getting on in life. Let us look at long Covid: one study in April indicated that its economic impact to Scotland could amount to £120 million every year and 11,000 jobs.

The Scottish Government is running out of friends when it comes to the national care service, too. Front-line workers, unions and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and now every Opposition party stand opposed to it. We absolutely need to fix the care crisis in our country, but that cannot happen while the Scottish Government remains wedded to that doomed act of centralisation, which would represent a gargantuan budget line.

There were big and difficult decisions for the new chancellor to make, but we fear that she has got too many of those decisions wrong. Workers, entrepreneurs and businesses up and down the country will be poring over the budget, too, right now. Raising employers' national insurance is a tax on recruitment and high streets and will make the health and care crisis potentially worse by hitting small care providers, who have been hit by the pandemic, the spike in prices and input costs, and are now hit by today's news.

To create a strong and growing economy, we need to back small business, fix the healthcare crisis and invest in the green jobs of the future, as well as fix our broken relationship with Europe. By ruling out a youth mobility scheme or long-term goals, such as rejoining the single market, the UK Government is trying to fix the economy with one hand tied behind its back.

Instead of raising the money that we need by reversing Conservative tax cuts for the big banks or asking social media and tech giants to pay more to clean up their mess with regard to the wreckage of our young people's mental health, the chancellor has chosen unfair tax hikes that will hurt the hard-working families, small businesses and family farms that are the engine rooms of our economy.

The Scottish Government now has choices to make as it looks ahead to its budget in December. In the past, it has chosen poorly, as embodied by the ferries scandal—hundreds of millions of pounds over budget and still not serving the islanders who have been so badly let down. After years of distraction and waste, it is time to focus on what really matters: putting communities first; fixing the NHS with fast access to treatment, general practitioners, dentists, and world-class mental health services; lifting up Scottish education; delivering a fair deal for Scotland's carers; and fixing our crumbling infrastructure while growing Scotland's economy.

These are important days. The lines and the detail contained in Rachel Reeves's budget, which are now being pored over, will set the weather for the remainder of this session of Parliament and the early days of the next. It is important that this Government makes the right choices with the money that is coming.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Cole-Hamilton. We move to the open debate. There is no time in hand. I ask for back-bench speeches of up to four minutes, please, and any interventions must be absorbed within the allocated speaking time.

17:25

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Ministers are always pleased if opposition parties put on the table what we would do differently. I say to the minister that that is exactly why we choose to have this kind of debate in Conservative time. We are doing it because it is so important. That is the reason.

To put the debate in context, we should look at what has been said to the Scottish Government by independent analysts throughout the course of this year. They have been debating extensively the predicament that the Scottish Government finds itself in not only because of the big black hole in the public finances but because of the difficulties that the Scottish Government has imposed on itself. They flagged up, first, the failure to deliver sustained economic growth; secondly, issues with delivery of better public services; and, thirdly, concerns over tax structures—especially the differentials. That has all been flagged up to the Scottish Government and that is the context in which we should be discussing these economic changes.

The bottom line is that Scotland is nowhere near producing the necessary growth levels—I completely refute what Lorna Slater said about that. I do not disagree about having a wider definition, but the fundamental point about economic growth is that we desperately need it to provide jobs, better incomes and all the things that people want.

If we listen to senior figures in business, which we do regularly, they all tell us that Scotland is not making best use of the resources that it has—especially our most talented people. They worry, too, about Scotland's increasing tax burden and the effect that that is having on middle to high earners—the people whom we desperately need to attract into the more important Scottish markets such as financial services, energy and technology, and food and drink.

Ivan McKee: Can the member explain why it is that year upon year, we see more and more net

migration of people moving to Scotland from the rest of the UK across all tax bands, rather than travelling in the other direction?

Liz Smith: As my colleagues spelled out in yesterday's debate, the level of migration is not nearly what it has been in the rest of the UK. As my colleague Murdo Fraser was asking yesterday, why is it that, when the UK rates are more important than the Scottish ones, we are not getting the benefit from that? That is the question that we have to be asking ourselves.

What needs to happen? First, the budget choices that are made in Scotland must absolutely reflect the priority of economic growth. That did not happen last February—as I think the minister might be prepared to acknowledge—when, for some inexplicable reason, the SNP Government decided to make an 8.3 per cent cut to the economy budget, which had a huge impact on employability schemes. That is the very important area that we have to be concentrating on—not only now, but in the future—because the employability schemes matter in terms of boosting our growth.

Secondly, I do not know how often the Finance and Public Administration Committee, in committee meetings and in the chamber, has highlighted the need for meaningful public sector reform. I have heard the minister say that we are making progress on that. I would like to see the data. Where is the evidence that we are making progress on that? I do not think that the public sees that progress. They do not see better public services—in fact, some would argue that they are worse. Where is the data that says that we are making meaningful public sector reform?

I will finish on this point. The choices that we make must be seen in the context of what the Scottish Fiscal Commission is independently telling us about the prospective spending that there will have to be on social care, the health service and social security, because if we do not address that problem, we will not be able to put Scotland back on the right footing so that we can make economic progress.

17:30

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Mr Griffin stated that it was a bold move for the Conservatives to lodge the motion for debate in the chamber, and I agree with him in many respects. I have heard many of the same old tropes from members on the benches opposite. The ferries were brought up, but those members are completely ignoring high speed 2, which has tripled in cost to £106 billion, and the £3.7 billion that has been spent on aircraft carriers that are still not in operation. Members can point out the

failures in Scotland, but they should have the decency to acknowledge what is happening elsewhere.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Clare Adamson: I am sorry—I do not have time.

Mr Cole-Hamilton raised the elephant in the room—the detrimental impact of Brexit, which Scotland did not want and did not vote for. The Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee has prepared a number of reports on that, and Mr Kerr is about to join us on that committee. He will hear from the Scottish businesses that told us about the damage that the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement has done to their ability to export.

Another thing that has been mentioned, and rightly so, is the success of foreign direct investment, which has largely been driven by the work of the international offices. Rather than supporting those efforts to be even more successful, the Conservatives decry the offices as “pretend embassies”. The British Council has said in its deliberations with the committee that Mr Kerr is about to join that it would welcome more offices being opened across the world because of their success in attracting foreign direct investment. Rather than joining the British Council in that, the Conservatives have said that the funding for overseas offices should be cut and that they are an unnecessary aspect of the Government's work abroad.

It is a tough time at the moment, but since 2007 GDP has grown in Scotland and has outpaced the rest of the UK. Record foreign direct investment projects were secured in Scotland in 2023. Scotland is the only part of the UK to have recorded growth for five consecutive years, and has done so to the highest level in a decade. According to Ernst & Young, Scotland is the top destination in the UK for FDI.

Our inability to secure workers because of Brexit is hampering our ability to fulfil that potential. *[Interruption.]* We do not have free movement of people. We cannot have what we had when we were part of the European Union, and it is beyond time that we were—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please resume your seat for a second, Ms Adamson. I have already said to members that we need to hear only from the person who has the floor. That happens to be Ms Adamson.

Clare Adamson: They do not like what I am saying, Presiding Officer, and they do not want it to be heard by the people of Scotland.

We are doing the best that we can do in that context.

The best way out of the predicament is not more austerity—it is not the austerity that we have had, and it is not the austerity that we are going to have following the budget announcement by the UK Government. We need to invest in infrastructure projects so that we can build the economy. *[Interruption.]* We have to invest our way out of this, because austerity completely failed, as has been shown by the performance of the Conservative Government and Liz Truss. We do not need red austerity and we do not need blue austerity: we need the ability for Scotland to make its own decisions so that we can get ourselves out of the economic crisis that is in Westminster's hands.

17:34

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): It is rather ironic that we are here today to debate the Tories' suggestions for how we can improve our economy and our nation's economic future, given their catastrophic mishandling of the UK's finances during the miserable 14 years for which they were in power. Indeed, the idea that the Tories are in any position to provide insight into fiscal competence is simply laughable. The damage that they have inflicted on the country's economy through promises not being funded or being underfunded, and through decisions being taken without care and without thought will unfortunately be felt for a long time to come, as the new UK Labour Government attempts to rebuild from the economic disaster that has been left to us by the Tories.

However, I believe that, when history is written, the past decade will be the story of two incompetent Governments. It is clear to me—I believe that it is becoming ever clearer to the people of Scotland—that, despite the fact that people in Scotland pay higher taxes than those in the rest of the UK, Scotland's public services are crumbling. Constituents are terrified as they sit on waiting lists in our NHS, not getting the treatment that they need or being unable to access crucial general practitioner services. Parents are worried about the quality of education that their children are receiving because teachers are undervalued and overstretched, and people are in desperate need of care packages that never seem to be available. However, despite all that, people across Scotland are asked to pay more and more for less and less, all while they watch the SNP Government pour money down the drain with nothing to show for it.

Take social care. Promise after promise has been made by the Scottish Government that its National Care Service (Scotland) Bill will deliver

the most significant reform to public services since the creation of the NHS. However, we are left with a proposal for a centralised procurement service that bakes privatisation into care delivery in Scotland—a proposal that has been abandoned by every key stakeholder, the trade unions, COSLA and even the Government's allies in this Parliament. Some £28 million has been spent and we are no further forward and no closer to delivering the social care provision that the country so desperately needs.

That is just one example. From the ferries fiasco to overreliance on agency staff in the public sector to delayed discharge in our NHS, the Scottish public have watched the SNP Government squander public finances while public services suffer.

I believe that, for the most part, people are happy to pay tax if they can see the benefit of doing so. They want their taxes to be used for better public services and to grow the economy in a way that will give people the best chances in life. Therefore, I must point to the fact that, if Scotland's economy had kept pace with the economy in other parts of the UK, it would now be worth billions of pounds more. For me, that points to the SNP's failure when it comes to economic policy, its failure to put in place an industrial strategy and its failure to recognise that, alongside taxation, we must have economic growth to build a successful and prosperous Scotland. That is why I will support the Labour amendment.

17:38

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): This debate highlights the SNP Government's failure to prioritise economic growth over the past 17 years. The motion calls on the Scottish Government to put growth front and centre in its upcoming budget. For years, the SNP Scottish Government has paid lip service to the idea of economic growth but has acted differently when it comes to changing its policy. Last year, we saw a tax-and-axe budget for 2024-25 that increased income tax and failed to pass on rates relief to small businesses. That was after the SNP had spent two years in coalition with a party that shows complete contempt for economic growth, with an approach that would destroy jobs and investment.

We do not have to look far to see what happens when a Government decides to neglect growth. Scotland is forecast to have the fifth-lowest GDP of the regions of the United Kingdom. That dismissive attitude towards economic growth has had consequences, and it impacts on businesses across Scotland.

Today's motion mentions £624 million in lost tax revenue for 2022-23, which the Scottish Fiscal Commission calculated. That funding could and should have been put into supporting public services, which we all depend on. Clearly, the SNP should be shifting its focus and implementing growth policies rather than attitudes. One of the biggest obstacles that we face is the SNP's poor relationship with the Scottish business community. Despite announcing a so-called new deal for businesses last year, there have been no signs that that relationship will improve any time soon.

Members do not have to listen to me or to others on the Conservative benches. They can look at the failings or listen to the Scottish business monitor report by the Fraser of Allander Institute, which says that two thirds of Scottish businesses believe that Scotland's Government does not understand their needs. Only 6 per cent of businesses believe that the Scottish Government

"engages effectively with the sector".

Although confidence in the Government is very low across the board, in two key areas—finance and construction—it is exceptionally poor. On top of that, two thirds of Scottish businesses said that income tax policies are having an impact on their business.

The anti-business and anti-growth agenda ran straight through the heart of the Bute house agreement. No doubt businesses were hopeful that the end of that agreement would mean a change in the Government's attitude. So far, there has been no sign of that, and we cannot look forward to seeing anything in the future.

Regardless of the narrative, the truth appears to be that prosperity is very low in the Scottish Government's priorities for the future. It is time for the Government to change its course, support growth and deliver the Scottish economy's potential, which is enormous.

17:42

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): We have to face the fact that Brexit is what broke Britain. We had a number of years of austerity—Labour and Tory—before that, but Brexit broke Britain. As if that was not enough, Liz Truss took her turn and tanked the economy.

The motion that we are debating is hypocrisy at an unprecedented level. The Scottish Government, despite facing obstacles at every turn, has done a remarkable job of delivering economic progress and social benefits that consistently outshine those of other parts of the UK.

Of course, in Scotland, people pay the lowest tax in the UK.

Craig Hoy: What?

Keith Brown: That seems to come as a revelation to some Conservatives—which demonstrates their ignorance. [*Interruption.*]

However, it is simply the case that a majority of people in Scotland pay less tax than those in the rest of the UK. Some people pay more, and those who do pay more tend to be higher earners. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Brown, please resume your seat for a second. Members, for the third—and, hopefully, the last—time, when a member has the floor, we listen to that member politely and otherwise seek to make an intervention.

Keith Brown: I know that it is hard to listen to, but people in Scotland pay less tax than people in the rest of the UK. Those who pay more are the highest earners, and that is fair, because in Scotland we choose to support our communities and not bail out banks while ordinary families struggle.

The motion suggests that the Scottish Government has failed to deliver better outcomes. Let us look at some outcomes. We have scrapped tuition fees. Every day, we hear stories about people down south who are struggling with massive debts that they have no expectation of being able to pay off before they end their working lives. We have free bus travel for more than 2 million people in Scotland. We have the best-performing core accident and emergency departments in the UK and the highest number of general practitioners per capita in the UK. We have abolished rates for more than 100,000 small businesses, increased international exports by a staggering 69 per cent since 2007 and invested £11 billion in Scotland's rail infrastructure.

When Westminster imposed cruel policies such as the bedroom tax, it was the Scottish Government that stepped up, by investing £74.8 million to protect people from its worst impacts, and it invested millions more to offset the child benefit cap. Where is Labour on those issues? It is nowhere to be seen when it matters.

Lorna Slater mentioned the article in *The Daily Telegraph* entitled "Why thousands are fleeing to Scotland—and why you should too". Even *The Daily Telegraph* acknowledges that life in Scotland under the SNP is better than it was before and better than it is elsewhere. [*Interruption.*] I know that, again, that is hard for the Conservatives to accept.

We are seeing more net migration to Scotland, which obviously means that people who read that

article believe that life is better in Scotland. One of those new Scots is Ellie Jones, a young woman from Cheshire who came to study at the University of Stirling in my constituency. She graduated, stayed and now works at the university. She shared her experience, saying:

“There are so many benefits that people don’t think about, like free dental care until you are 25. Free prescriptions and eye tests are also brilliant. You don’t realise it until you have them—they are such a big bonus.”

That is the reality for people living in Scotland, yet here we are being asked to trust the economic wisdom of a party whose leader—I do not think he is here now; I think that he has left the debate—once said, “In Liz we trust”. Now, he is back-peddalling, saying:

“We all get things wrong.”

Those are the legacies of Russell Findlay: “In Liz we trust” and “We all get things wrong”. Mr Findlay backed Liz Truss, betting on the one Prime Minister who managed to crash and burn faster than any Prime Minister in recent history, which showed his breathtakingly poor judgment. Now, the Tories are back, urging Scotland to adopt the same tax-cutting frenzy that Truss chased after—the very same agenda that left the UK in economic turmoil.

They really do not like hearing about Liz Truss on that side of the chamber, but we will take no lessons from the Tories. Their track record is loud and clear, as is ours, though in a very different way. The economic change that we should be considering is one that will truly empower people, boost our jobs and provide growth.

There might be a lesson for the Tory party. What it thought was a symbiotic relationship with the Labour Party in this chamber—when it was about always attacking the SNP—was a parasitic relationship. The Tory Party is having its lunch eaten by the Labour Party, which will replace it as the biggest unionist party at the next election. That is the reward that it gets for eight years of sticking with the Labour Party.

Scotland deserves better. We deserve the powers of a normal country with independence. We can unlock our future potential and truly thrive, and say goodbye to Brexit and Liz Truss.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

17:47

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): During these debates, various people choose to defy expectations and others confirm them. The Conservatives have played up to their reputation as the pantomime villains of Scottish politics—*[Interruption.]*—and they have brought a motion to

do the same. A few years ago, some of them were determined that Scotland should copy the disastrous mini-budget of Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng. Today, it seems that they are equally determined to drag the behaviour in this chamber down to the level of the House of Commons. I very much hope that they fail.

From other parties, we expect a serious debate. The amendments from both the Government and the Labour Party contribute to a more serious debate. In the Government’s amendment, I do not see anything that anyone could disagree with. It recognises the harm done by austerity, which is well understood in every community across the country, and it recognises the harm done by Brexit, which is well understood in every community, particularly in every business, across the country. The amendment refers to the value of using progressive taxation—which I will come on to in a little more detail later—to pay for things such as the Scottish child payment, free prescriptions and ensuring that people can go to university without ending up tens of thousands of pounds in debt for their tuition fees alone, as happens in England.

The amendment also makes the clear point that Opposition parties that contribute to discussions about the budget have a responsibility to at least try to make the sums add up. If they want more spending, they need to recognise the necessity to raise that revenue through taxation.

As for the amendment from the Labour Party, I am sorry that it is abundantly clear that it has entirely abandoned its support for progressive taxation. When Scotland moved to a five-band income tax system, the Labour Party supported and agreed with that change. Now, it no longer supports it—the Labour Party believes that it is wrong that anyone pays more tax in Scotland.

Let us look at the operation—

Mark Griffin: Will the member give way?

Patrick Harvie: With only four minutes for my speech, I am afraid that I do not have time.

Let us look at the operation of progressive tax in Scotland. Someone who is on £35,000 a year—that is not an exorbitant salary, but it is by no means a low income—pays barely more than £1 a week more in income tax. Those on significantly higher incomes, such as every member of this chamber, pay a fair bit more, and those on extremely high incomes pay their fair share, unlike anywhere else in the rest of the UK. Those on extremely high incomes pay significantly more.

In exchange for all that, we get all those policies that we have chosen to prioritise, whether that is the baby box, free prescriptions, free higher education or the knowledge that we live in a

society that has the decency to provide a Scottish child payment to those in need. That is what we all receive from a country that commits to progressive taxation.

Today, we have seen a UK budget that—I will give credit where it is due—begins to change the country's direction, and some of the ways in which it does so are welcome. I will take the time to study it. However, even the advocates of the Labour Party—their biggest fans—would not suggest that it brings the UK up to the level of investment that we see across the European Union or in the US, through the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, or that would have existed under the Labour Party's previous £28 billion green policy investment plan. It still leaves the Scottish Government with the responsibility to fund local services, to invest in net zero, to cut inequality and, as Parliament agreed earlier this month, to use every lever possible at our disposal to do those things, including progressive taxation and new local tax powers.

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

Patrick Harvie: There is an urgent need for that investment in net zero, and a need for tackling extreme wealth and tax avoidance.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Harvie.

Patrick Harvie: If the UK will not do it, it should give us the power.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have no time in hand. I call Michael Marra to close on behalf of Scottish Labour. You have up to four minutes.

17:51

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I welcome Craig Hoy to his role as Conservative finance spokesperson. He seems disorientated and bleary-eyed from the parallel universe that he has arrived from, where the Conservatives have not just slumped to the worst electoral defeat since the advent of democracy, but faced an entire repudiation of their economic and social record across the whole of the UK. He might want to recognise that advocating for the policies of Liz Truss, whose name has come up repeatedly today, does not get us better mortgage rates. Liz Truss's approach was an absolute disaster, which led to sky-high interest rates—

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Michael Marra: No, thank you, sir. I am just getting started.

Her approach led to sky-high interest rates, and people across this country are paying through the

nose as a result of the Conservative Government's approach.

There is some consensus across the chamber that the principal benefit of a growing economy and an economy that works properly is that people have money in their pockets—money that they can spend on their decisions. However, growth is also critical to generating the tax take that ensures that we can pay for our public services.

The economic decisions that we take to get that growth are vital. Since 2010, the lack of investment in the UK economy has left us in a perilous situation. Today, we turn the page on that chapter of our history. For too long, growth in this country has been choked off by a complete failure to invest in the people, the technology and the services that we require, not just in Scotland but across the UK. Of course, the SNP has failed to utilise the benefits of the Barnett formula and the additional £2,400 that we get per head of population in Scotland to protect our public services.

We know that, if Scottish growth had kept pace with the sclerotic performance of much of the UK over that period, our economy would be £8.5 billion larger. It is time to get Scotland growing again. There will be an additional £1.5 billion for the core Scottish budget this year and £3.4 billion next year—the largest-ever budget made available to any Government in Scotland.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Marra: No, thank you, sir. I do not have time.

The era of Tory and SNP austerity is at an end. The question now is whether the SNP can get that money to the front-line services that so desperately need it. One in six people in Scotland is on an NHS waiting list, there has been a decline in our school performance in international league tables, and there is a chaotic and incompetent Government that, rather than setting proper balanced budgets, has, for three years in a row, ended up making emergency spending cuts in the middle of the year.

Alex Rowley set out very convincingly just how incompetent the Government's approach has been to the key challenge of reforming our public services in the face of demographic, climate and technological change. He highlighted social care, education and transport, which are all in a complete mess in terms of this Government's policy development.

People want to see the difference that their tax makes in their communities and their day-to-day lives. If they are paying more, they want to see the results of that, but, unfortunately, under the SNP,

they pay more and get less in return. The SNP's conduct over recent weeks around the UK budget has destroyed any last vestiges of fiscal credibility that a once-serious political operation might have claimed. It has demanded the earth and opposed every means of paying the bill to fix the disastrous mess that these people have left to us. Well today's budget means that the time for blame and excuses—

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member take an intervention?

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

Michael Marra: —is finally, finally over.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Marra. I call minister Tom Arthur to close on behalf of the Scottish Government. You have up to five minutes.

17:56

The Minister for Employment and Investment (Tom Arthur): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I welcome Craig Hoy to his new role and wish him well. I look forward to our exchanges. I thank members for their contributions this afternoon.

The primary substance of the debate is the relationship between fiscal policy and economic growth, and there were some good contributions that focused on that. Other contributions have perhaps been more in the political space than the policy space. I will focus on the policy aspects.

We must be realistic about the situation that we face today. The past 14 years of UK Government have resulted in decisions that led to challenges, not only in Scotland but right across the UK, of anaemic growth and stagnant productivity. There were perhaps three central acts that contributed to that. When the UK Government came to power in 2010, it made a decision to pursue an austerity agenda. At a time when the economy, business and public services were crying out for investment and for priming the pump to stimulate demand, there was a withdrawal of funding, which undermined public services, the public realm and, crucially, economic development. We are contending with the legacy of that.

One of the consequences of austerity was that it fuelled the discontent that led to the vote in 2016 for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. Following that vote, not only did the UK Government ignore the result in Scotland, but it took a very narrow margin in the UK vote overall as a mandate for the hardest of hard Brexits. Is it any wonder that a combination of austerity and Brexit has led to the challenges in growth and productivity that we are facing today?

The final aspect of that was the pickled dogma of Liz Truss and the grotesque chaos of the mini-budget. That is the problem: austerity, Brexit and the mini-budget are all driven by ideology and fanaticism, and certainly not by commonsense politics. We have a job of work to do.

Michael Marra: Will the member take an intervention?

Tom Arthur: I am very sorry; I am limited for time.

I want to welcome the UK Government budget as a step in the right direction. I am not being churlish. I recognise the challenges that have to be wrestled with. If we want to fundamentally turn the dial on the past 14 years of UK Government rule, it will take sustained investment. I do not underestimate the challenges that the UK Government faces, but we will continue to work constructively with it. We will welcome when there is movement on things that we have called for, such as further capital investment. As members would expect, we will push further, as is incumbent on us as the devolved Government in Scotland. There is a way forward. The challenges that we face in Scotland are not unique—people across the UK face the same challenges.

I will touch on the contribution from Liz Smith, which, as always, was thoughtful and considered. She made a number of fair points, but it all comes back to the question of productivity and investment. I recognise that Labour wants to use the most advanced technology, and to use capital and skills. The challenges that we have had with productivity are directly linked to the austerity agenda, and I hope that we can now turn the situation around, not only in public services but in the private sector.

The Employment Rights Bill and the UK Government's make work pay agenda give us a real opportunity to put on a statutory footing the fair work first policy on which Scotland has led. That is another area where we want to work constructively. Strong trade union rights and strong employment law can also be drivers of productivity and business growth.

There are opportunities for constructive working, but if we are going to wrestle with these wicked problems and challenges, we need to have substantive policy debate in this Parliament. Every country is wrestling with these issues. In July's United Kingdom election result, a party was elected to government on 33 per cent of the vote. Populism is on the rise in the UK, Europe and North America. It is incumbent on us all, whether we are in government or in opposition, to work to drive up living standards and to have inclusive growth that lifts and benefits everyone. That is the

surest way to a future that is not only more prosperous but democratically secure.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, you need to conclude.

Tom Arthur: It is important that we have more debates like this one, but let us keep them focused on the substance and on the policy.

18:01

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It is my pleasure to wind up the debate for the Scottish Conservatives. As Craig Hoy set out at the start, we cannot ignore the fact that the debate is taking place on the same day as we have had the first UK Labour budget for 14 years, which has delivered a staggering £40 billion increase in the tax burden—the highest ever. Michael Marra needs to listen to the fact that, as a consequence of that budget, the bond markets are showing that long-term borrowing costs are up, and the OBR is predicting that inflation and interest rates will go up. That is the legacy of what we are seeing from Labour today.

Michael Marra: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I do not have time at the moment, but I might give way later, once I have made more points.

According to Mr Marra, there will be an additional £3.4 billion in the block grant. We will see the detail of that in due course but, if that is true, it will give the Scottish Government more wriggle room in the choices that it can make.

However, the UK budget is bad news for business, because it includes a hike in national insurance to 15 per cent and a staggering increase—to 78 per cent—in the windfall tax on oil and gas, which is doing enormous damage to the oil and gas sector and to the economy of north-east Scotland. There is also an increase in spirits duty and a hit on farmers passing on land. This afternoon, the National Farmers Union described it as a “disastrous budget” for family farmers and especially for tenant farmers.

What really galls people is the broken promises that we have had from Labour. In the run-up to the election, Keir Starmer said 50 times that Labour had no plans to increase taxes, but the truth has been revealed today.

The winter fuel allowance has been withdrawn from pensioners, and 900,000 pensioners across Scotland are impacted by that. There is no U-turn on that, and there is no sign of the £300 cut to fuel bills that was supposed to be promised.

Keir Starmer also said that he was going to back the Scotch whisky industry to the hilt. He has not

done that today—he has increased the duty on whisky and taxed the industry to the hilt instead.

I agree with what Michelle Thomson, who is in the chamber this afternoon, said yesterday about the need to put economic growth first. That ambition is shared by most parties across the chamber, although perhaps not by the Greens.

As Liz Smith said, we cannot ignore the impact on growth of differential tax rates in Scotland. We hear that from the finance sector, the hospitality sector and those who are involved in manufacturing. We hear that businesses are now having to pay a Scottish supplement in additional wages because of the higher taxes. That has an impact not only on the private sector but on the public sector, as we know that high earners in the health service, for example, are deliberately choosing not to work full-time hours because of the impact of higher tax.

In a survey that was done by the Fraser of Allander Institute last month, two out of three Scottish businesses said that the tax issue was having an impact on their businesses. It was the single biggest concern for Scottish businesses, with 27 per cent of the construction businesses that responded saying that it had a lot of impact on what they were trying to do and was, of course, impacting on recruitment.

What should the Scottish Government do with its budget? It has to start to address tax rates. In a speech earlier this week, my colleague Russell Findlay said that the 21p rate was one of the rates that could be removed to set a direction of travel in trying to equalise tax rates in Scotland with those in the rest of the UK.

The Scottish Government has to do something about its reputation with business. Alexander Stewart reminded us of another survey that was done by the Fraser of Allander Institute. Just 9 per cent of Scottish firms agree that the Scottish Government understands the business environment in Scotland, whereas 64 per cent disagree. Just 6 per cent of businesses agree that the Government engages well with their sector. The figure was a dismal 8 per cent in 2023, and it is now down to 6 per cent—so much for the new deal for business.

However, there is now an opportunity, because Barnett consequentials will be coming as a result of the UK budget. For the past two years, I have been calling for the Scottish Government to pass on to businesses that are struggling with rising costs in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors the 75 per cent rates relief that has been available south of the border last year and in the current year. Such businesses will struggle even more now because of the increases in employer national insurance.

Today, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, announced not that she would extend the 75 per cent rates relief but that she would introduce a new 40 per cent relief for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in England and Wales for the next financial year. I do not think that that goes far enough, but it is a welcome measure that will generate Barnett consequential for the Scottish Government. If Scottish ministers are serious about supporting Scottish businesses, it is time for them to help our struggling hospitality businesses, and they have the choice to do so now that the funds are available to them.

I am nearly out of time. I welcome the change in the Scottish Government's rhetoric, now that the Greens are no longer part of the Administration, with it talking again about economic growth. That is very welcome, but it is time for the Government to put its money where its mouth is. It now needs to start to address the impact of tax on the Scottish economy. That point is made in Craig Hoy's motion, which I am delighted to support.

Business Motions

18:08

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-15072, 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 5 November 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 6 November 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Keeping The Promise

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 7 November 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Social Justice

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Brexit Impacts on Scotland's Rural Economy

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 12 November 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 13 November 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist
Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 14 November 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Education and Skills

followed by Constitution, Europe, External Affairs
and Culture Committee Debate: UK-EU
Trade and Cooperation Agreement

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 4 November 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*]

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motions S6M-15073 and S6M-15074, on stage 1 timetables for bills; S6M-15075, on a stage 2 timetable for a bill; and S6M-15076, on a stage 2

extension for a bill. I call Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motions.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Education (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 20 December 2024.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 28 March 2025.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Judicial Factors (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 29 November 2024.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be extended to 28 February 2025.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

18:09

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-15078, on consideration of a Scottish statutory instrument. I call Alexander Burnett, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that nothing further be done under the Local Services Franchises (Traffic Commissioner Notices and Panels) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 (SSI 2024/229), that is to say, that the instrument be annulled.—
[Alexander Burnett]

18:10

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I lodged a motion to annul the instrument so that, at yesterday's meeting of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, we would have the option to annul it once we had heard from the minister, Jim Fairlie. I did not expect to move that motion yesterday, but, after hearing from the minister, I was convinced that the instrument should be annulled.

Let me make a few points to start with. Annuling the SSI will not mean that franchising cannot take place, nor will it mean delay to transport authorities being able to bring forward their plans for franchising. It will not even delay the franchising process. Annuling the instrument will allow the Government to change the legislation, to enable us to have a process that works, and will permit bus franchising to take place if that is what our regional partnerships want.

For me, annulling the SSI is not about making a party-political point or derailing, in a backhanded way, legislation that has been approved by the Parliament; it is about the committee process and the Parliament working as it should do, by providing the post-legislative scrutiny that it is meant to.

The franchising process was put into legislation in good faith, but the Parliament should have the courage to accept that such a process has been tried in other parts of the country and has failed. It would be completely wrong of us to plough on regardless when we have taken evidence from people who have studied the franchising process and told us that we should simplify it.

Yesterday, the committee heard that the SPT—and for the minister's benefit—

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Douglas Lumsden: I will take an intervention.

Graham Simpson: When the minister speaks, he might claim that voting to annul the instrument will bring work on franchising to a halt or will take us back to square 1. That would be completely wrong.

Earlier today, I spoke to Valerie Davidson, the chief executive of Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, who told me that nothing that it is doing will change. It will continue to work on the strategy. It will not be in a position to decide whether it wants to pursue franchising until late next year. If it decides to go ahead, it could be 2027 before a panel—the issue here is about establishing a panel—would be handed anything. Does Mr Lumsden agree that that would allow us ample time to amend the legislation or to find another solution, so that we could have a workable and democratically accountable system?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Lumsden, I can give you back some of the time for that intervention.

Douglas Lumsden: It is good that Graham Simpson spoke to SPT today, to hear from it exactly what the implications of annulling the SSI would be. If the panel appointment stage is more than two years away, we would have ample time to amend the legislation and get it right.

Personally, I would like to see the franchising process simplified. We can see from the flowchart provided by Transport Scotland that the process is pretty long, with audit of financial implications and consultation built into it long before any panel is appointed. The Government should take this time to review and improve the process. For me, that would show strength and not weakness on the part of the Government. It would show that it is willing to learn lessons and to implement good legislation that can work.

18:13

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): At its meeting yesterday, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee agreed to a motion to annul the SSI that we are debating today. Scottish Labour supports that position.

Despite the additional powers that emerged through the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, which were intended to give local authorities the option of franchising bus services in their areas, such franchising remains a complex process. One example of that can be seen in the work that Andy Burnham has conducted in Greater Manchester to bring bus services under a franchising model. That process will have been on-going for more than seven years by the 25 January date for full implementation, and it will have been subjected to

extensive scrutiny during that time. Under the 2019 Scottish act, the process would have included a further six-month process to enable an unelected official to have their say on the matter. However, I believe that it should be for local authority elected representatives to determine the proposals.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the member give way on that point?

Alex Rowley: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

I also believe that that view is in keeping with the spirit of the powers that were created through the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.

When we look at the work that has been done elsewhere in the UK on bus franchising, we see a country that is moving towards legislation that is designed to simplify the process. Whether we are talking about UK Labour's proposed better buses bill or the work that the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales have done on their road map to bus reform and franchising, the purpose of those exercises is to simplify the processes.

Therefore, it would be disappointing if Scotland, having been the first to do the work to introduce a route to bus franchising, was left with the most complex process for achieving that. I fully support local authorities having the ability to run their own bus services, to franchise bus services in their areas or to enter into bus service improvement partnerships with bus operators in their areas.

I believe that the bus network in Scotland has suffered under the private operator model that we have had for too long and that it is time that the power to determine what is best for an area when it comes to bus service provision was put back into the hands of people and communities across the country. That is why it is crucial that bus franchising is made as simple as possible. The annulment of the SSI that is before us will be a step in the right direction to achieving that.

18:16

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): It is clear that our communities have suffered from years of bus services being run for private profit rather than in the public interest, so change is desperately needed in order that the public can take greater control over how our services are run.

The SSI that we are considering today would create a system whereby a panel of experts established by the traffic commissioner would have the final say on new franchising proposals. However, the previous traffic commissioner was reported as having made comments against bus franchising. Given that the stated objective of the traffic commissioner is to

"minimise regulatory burden on operators",

that does not give confidence to transport authorities that their plans will be fairly judged.

Yesterday, the minister attempted to allay those concerns by pointing to future guidance, but it is not clear how such future guidance will address the fundamental concern. How will the public interest be reflected on the panel rather than its being dominated by members who have a largely technical view of bus operation that comes from their experience in a privatised sector? Unfortunately, there are even some in the private bus industry who, sadly, have stated that they see the proposed changes as a form of theft of their business model.

The minister said that the issues in question could have been debated in 2019, when the Transport (Scotland) Bill was considered, but SPT raised strong concerns in evidence at the time. In the original consultation on the bill, it was ministers who were to make the final decision on franchising. The switch to the use of a panel in the final 2019 act was warmly welcomed by private operators, including FirstGroup. Today, we know that the panel system has been discredited and that new models of partnership between national and local government appear to be the most effective and most robust way of introducing franchising. According to an adviser to the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government's on-going commitment to the panel process leaves Scotland as a backward-facing outlier on bus reform in the UK.

Yesterday, as we have heard, the NZET Committee could not have been clearer in its support for new bus franchising and municipal models, but we need to ensure that the legislation that underpins that mission actually works. Therefore, the Greens will vote to annul the SSI, and it is up to the Government to consider whether improvements can be made to the panel process or whether a change through primary legislation is now needed.

Regardless of the outcome tonight, SPT will, I believe, continue to work on franchising over the next two years, even though no guidance on that is currently available from the Scottish Government. I, too, spoke to the chief executive of SPT this afternoon. As it is unlikely that any decision on any proposal that emerges from SPT's work will go for approval until summer 2027, there really is time for the Parliament to fix the problem. I am sure that SPT and others will be prepared to work with Transport Scotland and ministers on further necessary reforms should primary legislation be needed.

18:19

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, which I sit on, was of one voice yesterday in saying that we all support franchising. Much has been said about an independent panel system being a barrier to franchising. I understand that that was considered to be the position in relation to franchising with Nexus in England in 2015. Our legislation was passed in 2019, and it will have taken account of the situation some four years earlier. In 2019, the Parliament came together to decide that an independent three-member panel should be a final check and balance on the system. If the SSI is annulled, that does not scrap that panel. The panel will still come into effect. However, it would block guidance that was developed by the Government in the public interest to ensure that franchising has a safe, secure public-interest pathway. In my view, blocking that guidance would have a negative effect.

Douglas Lumsden: Will Bob Doris take an intervention?

Bob Doris: I do not think that I have time. I apologise to Mr Lumsden for that.

That said, any party—Government or Opposition—could consider an alternative to the regulations and bring it to the Parliament. If it did, legislative change could be forthcoming that would sweep away both the panel and the guidance. To only block guidance in the public interest is ill considered and ill thought out. I say to Parliament that we should support guidance in the public interest. If politicians wish to look at the matter again, let us do that.

I will not be supporting the annulment.

18:21

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): I feel that I must express my extreme disappointment and—dare I say it?—my surprise at the short-sightedness of the decision of members of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, who voted yesterday to move to annul the vital regulations before us, which represent one of the very final pieces of the jigsaw that will allow us to undo some of the damage done to one of our vital public services by Thatcherism's obsession with selling off the nation's assets—in this case, the maligned deregulation of bus services.

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, which was passed by this Parliament, set us on a journey of giving control back to local authorities in a number of ways to ensure that the people of Scotland have an affordable, reliable bus service that works for

the people who rely on it most, rather than providing dividend payments for shareholders.

Franchising is one of the most important and—dare I say it?—ambitious measures, and supporting the motion to annul the regulations puts the brakes on years of work and progress towards delivering that vision and turning it into a reality for the people of Scotland. It may well jeopardise the ability to deliver franchising progress in this session of Parliament.

If we break down what is, in reality, a fairly complex process for the sake of simplicity, we find that the regulations allow for the creation of a panel that will scrutinise the proposals of an authority to develop a franchise, ensure the robustness of the business case and satisfy itself that the authority has done proper due diligence and has consulted the appropriate people, organisations and neighbouring authorities, so that all considerations are made and required actions completed.

It cannot be the case that such a major financial and socially important decision should be taken without full and robust scrutiny. The very presence of a panel to carry out that role will be the insurance policy that we need, so that authorities will adopt the level of rigour that is required to get the process right, and right first time.

The Labour Party's position—that panels do not work because of the experience in England—simply does not stack up, because highlighting the single panel decision on which it based its comparison is like comparing apples with oranges. That panel only considered the financial business case, which was not robust.

There are many other arguments that could be made but, with an eye on the time, I will confirm what I told the committee yesterday. I instructed the chief executive officer of Transport Scotland to talk to the CEO of SPT, which is the only authority that is currently considering franchising as an option. Some would say that it is a trailblazer for future possibilities; its response was emphatic. SPT is currently developing a new regional bus strategy. Although the strategy is yet to be finalised, in its discussion, SPT noted the importance of checks and balances in the franchising process. Given that it is among the options under consideration, SPT felt that, should the regulations be annulled, it would not be suitable to leave the primary legislation in its current form, with no supporting regulations. *[Interruption.]* It highlighted the need for a quick resolution to the current position, noting that any legislative changes should be delivered timeously, and it has intimated a desire to work collaboratively with Transport Scotland and other partners to identify a workable solution. *[Interruption.]*

I do not know whether you can hear me, Presiding Officer, because of all this noise.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, resume your seat. I remind members that they are perfectly entitled to ask for an intervention, but it is at the discretion of the person who has the floor whether he or she takes that intervention. There should therefore not be heckling or conversations around the chamber. Let us listen to the minister conclude his remarks.

Jim Fairlie: In the interests of time, I will continue, because there are a lot of points to get through. As the regional bus strategy continues to be developed, with franchising as one of the options, it needs certainty of direction. These regulations deliver that certainty, and annulment takes that certainty away. If the annulment is successful, it is possible to continue with the progress of the legislation. A panel would or could still be established, but no one other than the traffic commissioner would have any say on its parameters, guidance or timescales of implementation. There would be no Government input into one of the most fundamental safeguards that the legislation is designed to introduce. It would be left entirely up to the transport commissioner, which is simply untenable. The other flawed option that is being proposed by others—

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is concluding

Minister, you need to conclude. You had up to three minutes.

Jim Fairlie: The other flawed option that is being proposed by others is a change to primary legislation. At this point in the parliamentary session, that, too, is simply untenable. It would mean that franchising would be delayed into the next parliamentary session, with whatever make-up of Government that delivers. Again, there would be no certainty for the people who rely on bus travel most. Buses are our most used public transport service, so it is too high a risk to take when we have already come so far in delivering what the people have clearly stated they want.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, you need to conclude. [*Interruption.*]

Jim Fairlie: I could understand if there was a desire to kill the idea of franchising. The Tory position on the issue is understandable, but what makes no sense whatsoever—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, I ask you to resume your seat for a second. I have asked the minister to conclude. I will not be barracked, nor will he. I will start naming

individuals if they are not careful. Minister, you need to conclude; you are well over time, and we are already behind time.

Jim Fairlie: Bear with me, Presiding Officer. If Labour and the Greens vote with the Tories today and annul the regulations, they will have in effect blocked franchising from proceeding in Scotland for years to come. The Scottish National Party knows where we stand on this. We stand for improving the bus network for the benefit of bus passengers, operators, local communities and businesses. We hope that, even at this stage, Labour and the Greens recognise that this is where they want to be, too.

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

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-15079, on approval of an SSI. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022 (Extension of Temporary Justice Measures) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Liam Kerr, who joins us remotely, for up to three minutes.

18:27

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I wish to speak against the motion to pass the coronavirus extension regulations, but let me be clear exactly why. I find myself in the perhaps unusual position of actually understanding where the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs was coming from with regard to the continuation of many of these measures when she was responding to questions at committee. However, we cannot ignore that the legislation was brought forward in response to the pandemic, most of the direct impact of which ceased around three years ago. There can be no analysis whereby good practice is to simply extend legislation brought in during an emergency in a vacuum of scrutiny. That is why I have concerns about the fiscal fines regime aspect of this SSI.

A fiscal fine is a direct measure that prosecutors may offer to an accused as an alternative to prosecution in court. The legislation that the Government seeks to extend today increases the maximum amount that can be issued through a fiscal fine to £500. However, data shows that around two fifths of accused who rejected a fiscal fine faced no further action. In short, not only do criminals—for that is what they are if they are in this situation—avoid a court process and, indeed,

any sanction, but, of course, victims are left in the dark as a result.

The problem is compounded not only by the SSI bringing more criminals within scope but, three years on, the Government's still not having bothered to collate reliable up-to-date data showing the outcome of this so-called temporary change to our law. It is instructive that the Scottish Government itself appears to recognise the need for much greater scrutiny of this change in that it seeks to make it permanent in a forthcoming bill.

Perhaps by then it will have presented robust comprehensive data on the increase and thus adduced evidence as to why the measure is required and whether the stated outcomes at the time have been achieved and will continue. In the absence of such evidence, it is deeply inappropriate to extend legislation on the nod. For that reason, I ask Parliament to vote against the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Angela Constance to respond, for up to three minutes, please.

18:29

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Colleagues will remember that the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022 included a number of temporary justice measures to ensure that our justice system was able to respond to the acute impact of the pandemic. Although there has been significant progress towards recovery, we still have some way to go. Therefore, it is necessary to extend the remaining measures for one final year, so that they stay in effect until the end of 30 November 2025, and that move has been backed by our justice partners.

There has been considerable progress in reducing the backlog of cases in the courts, with the number of outstanding scheduled trials falling by more than 45 per cent between January 2022 and September 2024. However, modelling by the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service anticipates that backlogs and solemn trials will continue above the target baseline until 2026-27. Therefore, these measures will ensure that court resources are used efficiently.

The availability of the higher maximum fiscal fine means that, where appropriate, more summary cases can be diverted from prosecution, reducing the number of cases that go to court. We are talking about cases that, if they were not subject to a fiscal fine, would potentially go to a justice of the peace court and, in all likelihood, would be subject to a financial penalty. There is a pragmatic reason for the use of fiscal fines.

After my recent evidence session with the Criminal Justice Committee, I wrote a follow-up letter, on 24 October, outlining further information and presenting particular data to the committee. Parliament might want to be aware that the Crown Office also regularly updates Parliament on a range of matters relating to its functions.

Turning to the two extended time limits, those are for one further year only. There is no power to extend them beyond next year, and we are not introducing primary legislation to extend them. These regulations are necessary to increase the courts' capacity to hear trials by, again, ensuring that the resources are not diverted to holding large numbers of procedural hearings to extend time limits on an individual case-by-case basis. I am sure that Parliament does not want to risk compromising the courts' capacity to focus on progressing trials and reducing the backlog. As the Lord Advocate highlighted to members on 10 October, removal of the time limits right now would present a serious risk that victims and witnesses might be deprived of their access to justice.

To conclude, I acknowledge Mr Kerr's comments. There are indeed a limited number of these temporary measures that are being baked into permanent legislation that has been introduced to Parliament.

I believe that the regulations are a package and are crucial to assisting our continued recovery, and I commend the motion to Parliament.

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

The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motion S6M-15080, on approval of a United Kingdom statutory instrument; motion S6M-15081, on approval of an SSI; and motion S6M-15094, on committee membership.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Vehicle Emissions Trading Schemes (Amendment) Order 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Procurement (International Trade Agreements) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Elena Whitham be appointed to replace Ruth Maguire as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Decision Time

18:34

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): There are a mere 10 questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S6M-14899, in the name of John Swinney, on a motion of condolence, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament expresses its shock and sadness at the untimely death of Alex Salmond; offers its deep sympathy and condolences to his family and friends; appreciates the many years of public service that he gave as an MP, MSP, and First Minister of Scotland, and recognises the substantial and significant contribution that he made over many decades to public life, Scottish and UK politics and the cause of Scottish independence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-15060.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15060, in the name of Miles Briggs, on funding for teachers and schools in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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

18:34

Meeting suspended.

18:37

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S6M-15060.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15060, in the name of Miles Briggs. Members should cast their votes now.

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)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 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, 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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 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)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 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 Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-15060.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, is: For 62, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

The vote is therefore tied. As is usual when the Parliament has not been able to reach a decision, I am obliged to exercise a casting vote. The established convention is to vote in favour of the status quo, because the chair is required to act impartially. Therefore, I cast my vote against the amendment.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-15060.1, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15060, in the name of Miles Briggs, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-15060, in the name of Miles Briggs, on funding for teachers and

schools in Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy 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)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 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)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 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, 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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-16050, in the name of

Miles Briggs, on funding for teachers and schools in Scotland, as amended, is: For 61, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: For the next vote, I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Ivan McKee is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Mark Griffin will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-15061.2, in the name of Ivan McKee, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15061, in the name of Craig Hoy, on using the upcoming Scottish budget to support economic growth, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

Against

Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 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)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-15061.2, in the name of Ivan McKee, is: For 69, Against 52, Abstentions 3.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-15061, in the name of Craig Hoy, on using the upcoming Scottish budget to support economic growth, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I tried to amend my vote in the previous division, but my app did not attach in time. The issue has happened again and I have not been able to connect on my phone.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: How do you want to vote on this one?

Clare Adamson: I do not know; I have never been in the situation where I have had to amend a vote halfway through. The system said, "You have voted no," and I tried to go back. I would prefer it if my vote for this one was yes and the previous one was no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I realise that we are in uncharted territory here, but your vote has not been cast, so how do you want to vote on this question?

Clare Adamson: I would like to vote yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will record a yes vote.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect; I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Dornan. I will ensure that that is recorded.

I can advise Carol Mochan that her vote was registered.

For

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

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)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowe, 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)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 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)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-15061, in the name of Craig Hoy, on using the upcoming Scottish budget to support economic growth, as amended, is: For 69, Against 52, Abstentions 3.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament condemns the impact of the former UK Conservative administration's austerity and Brexit on the public finances and the wider economy; recognises that progressive taxation in Scotland has ensured that funding has been available to deliver actions to tackle poverty, like the Scottish Child Payment; notes that the latest available evidence shows that Scotland had positive net inward migration of taxpayers from the rest of the UK and was positive for every tax band; further notes that the process to develop the Scottish Budget for 2025-26 is underway; challenges those who would propose reducing tax rates to identify the public services that they would then cut to deliver the required balanced budget; deplors the call from the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party to introduce an illness tax in the form of prescription charges, and believes that the Baby Box, free prescriptions, free personal care, free eye examinations and free university tuition should be protected and sustained for the future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S6M-15078, in the name of Alexander Burnett, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on consideration of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Callaghan. I will ensure that that vote 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)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

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)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 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, 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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-15078, in the name of Alexander Burnett, on consideration of a Scottish statutory instrument, is: For 62, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

The vote is therefore tied. As is the established convention, I, as the Presiding Officer, must exercise a casting vote, which must be in favour of the status quo, because the chair is required to act impartially. Therefore, I cast my vote against the motion.

Motion disagreed to.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Jamie Hepburn): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Can you clarify for Parliament that the proposition that the Government is seeking to take forward will now advance?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The motion to annul was not agreed to.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. This is a motion to annul an SSI that would have changed the status quo. Does your ruling still stand?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Cole-Hamilton, because it is a negative SSI, that is therefore the status quo.

The next question is, that motion S6M-15079, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022 (Extension of Temporary Justice Measures) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If no member objects, I propose to ask a single question on three Parliamentary Bureau motions. The question is, that motions S6M-15080, on approval of a UK SI, S6M-15081, on approval of an SSI, and S6M-15094, on committee membership, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Vehicle Emissions Trading Schemes (Amendment) Order 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Procurement (International Trade Agreements) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Elena Whitham be appointed to replace Ruth Maguire as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. On motion S6M-15079, the call was no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have to say that I did not hear a no, Mr Whitfield.

Martin Whitfield: I apologise for the frailty of my voice, but it was announced. Could the question be put again?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In fairness, Mr Whitfield, I do not doubt that you might have said no, but I did not hear it. I am afraid that, once I have said that Parliament is agreed and I have moved on to the next item, I cannot go backwards. I am sorry.

That concludes decision time, and I close this meeting of Parliament.

Meeting closed at 18:51.

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