

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 6 March 2003

Session 1

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 6 March 2003

[THE DEPUTY PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

Scottish Executive (Record)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh): The first item of business is a debate on motion S1M-3986, in the name of David McLetchie, on the record of the Scottish Executive.

09:30

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): Labour's latest slogan is

"Four Years, Forty Real Achievements",

but it is the hollowest of hollow boasts. One does not need to be Einstein to know that there is deep disillusionment with devolution even among those who were once its most ardent supporters. Devolution has simply not lived up to the inflated and unrealistic expectations of four years ago. The blame for that lies fairly and squarely with our Government of the past four years, which has been a Labour and Liberal Democrat—sorry, Liberal Democrat—coalition.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Right first time.

David McLetchie: Yes, I was right first time. I will start putting that on posters.

In "Recording Our Achievements"—as the Executive calls them—the claim is made that the Executive has focused on the five areas of health, education, transport, crime and the economy, which affect everyone regardless of who they are and where they live. I agree that those are indeed the key issues. Given that they are, however, people are entitled to ask why we have wasted so much time, effort and money during the past four years on politically correct nonsenses such as land reform, section 28, fox hunting, fur farming and trying to brand loving parents as criminals.

We all know that the latest First Minister likes to pretend that history began when he took office—the year-zero, Pol Pot approach to politics. Fortunately, voters have slightly longer memories and will rightly judge Labour on its record over four years. That record is one of failure to deliver real improvement, irrespective of who has been notionally in charge.

More important, the Executive is failing on its own terms. It claims to champion the poor and to

stand for enterprise and fairness. I do not doubt its sincerity, but there is nothing fair about failing public services or taking more and more from people in taxes while failing to deliver real improvements. Under Labour, we have had 53 tax increases since 1997, but we have not experienced the improvements in public services such as health and education that we are entitled to expect in return.

The Executive does not seem to realise why, so perhaps I can help it. The failure comes from the fact that the Labour party in Scotland and its fellow travellers—that lot, the Liberal Democrats—still cling to the outdated belief that more regulation, higher taxes, higher spending and more centralised state control are the answers to all our problems.

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): By implication, Mr McLetchie views the last Conservative Administration—I hope that it is the very last—as a success. However, its record included the two biggest recessions since the second world war, the introduction of the iniquitous poll tax and mass unemployment, which it used quite deliberately as an economic tool. If that is success, would Mr McLetchie care to admit to any failures?

David McLetchie: I will gladly confess to the fact that the Conservatives transformed the economy of Scotland and set Britain as a whole on the right path. In the things that it has done right, the Labour Government has adopted and copied our approach. It is clear that Labour has benefited by learning lessons from the Conservative approach in the few things that it has done well. Bill Butler would do well to reflect on that.

The attitude of mind of the Labour Administration is that the state and society are one and the same. For Labour, only the state can improve our quality of life, so more and more power is accumulated at the centre. The state will run everything, control everything, regulate everything, monitor everything, have targets for everything and tell everyone what to do. The same prescription comprehensively failed our economy in the past and it works no better now as a way of improving our public services or strengthening society.

Mr Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab): Will the member give way?

David McLetchie: Sorry—perhaps later.

The fact that that approach does not work has not prevented all the other parties in the chamber from offering variations on the theme. The Liberal Democrats like to preen themselves with the notion that they have made the difference in Scotland.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I agree. Thanks for that.

David McLetchie: That just shows how out of touch the Liberal Democrats are. Only a Liberal such as Mr Rumbles would want to take credit for a record of failure. The truth is that the Liberal Democrats invented the irrelevance agenda long before Labour took it up. Their incompetence is equalled only by their insufferable self-righteous sanctimony. They are no so much a political party as a bunch of charlatans. The Liberal Democrats are simply a pale imitation of Labour and they should do the honest thing by merging with Labour.

The Scottish National Party is no better. In the last analysis, it offers us a change of passport but not a change of policy—only even more of the same. It claims to be an opposition party but has opposed only three Government bills in three and a half years of the Parliament. That is because the SNP is a self-proclaimed left-wing political party that is a fully paid up member of the political establishment that is failing Scotland today.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Given all that Mr McLetchie has said, he should cast his eye on the benches behind him. It is an open secret that, if the Conservatives lose more than four seats at the next election, his job is up for grabs. Will Mr McLetchie look at his own house before tidying up everyone else's?

David McLetchie: For Mr Wilson to advise on losing jobs is a bit like the pot calling the kettle black. He will be in the unemployment queue a lot earlier in his political life than I will be in mine.

Scotland deserves a great deal better. The Scottish Conservatives are the only party that offers a genuine alternative. In Scotland today, too much power is concentrated in the hands of politicians and bureaucrats and too little resides with the institutions and people who make up our society. That is why our policies are based on the principle of decentralisation—what we might call real devolution—which seeks to reduce the scope and power of the state and its agencies and to give back power to parents, patients, professionals and local communities. We know that politicians do not have all the answers and that we must place our trust in people.

Scotland needs a programme of reform that restores people to individual, independent citizenship. Instead of treating people as victims of a society who are in constant need of help, we would treat them as responsible adults who are capable of making choices for themselves. The key is to create opportunities for self-improvement to enable people to fulfil their potential and to rise as far as their talents and efforts will take them. That means providing a firm foundation of high-

quality public services on which people can rely and which will enable them to build a better future for themselves and their families.

That must start from a secure foundation of public order. Crime, especially violent crime, is rising in Scotland today. Such crime affects everyone in every community but, as we all know, it preys disproportionately on some of the most vulnerable people in our society: the poor, the elderly, youngsters drawn into drug abuse and people from our ethnic communities. In response to the situation, the Scottish Executive came up with the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, which proposed to ban smacking and to send 16 and 17-year-old offenders to the children's panel. How typical of a justice department that is headed by Jim Wallace and the Liberal Democrats.

Beating crime and providing secure communities requires real reform. I believe that that must start from a zero-tolerance approach. We need to tackle crime at its roots by challenging the graffiti, vandalism and yobbery that undermine so many communities and create a culture of crime. Our police forces should be far more accountable to the communities that they serve. Crime figures should be published for each neighbourhood. Fundamental to the success of such an approach is to put far more police officers on our streets to ensure that there is a visible presence to deter crime and to detect criminals.

Of course, that means that we must have a criminal justice system that is capable of dealing with the work load. That requires an improved prosecution service, an efficient courts system, certainly more places in secure accommodation for persistent young offenders and enough prison places to meet the demands of justice. As someone once rightly said, "Prison works." It protects the public and it deters criminal behaviour—

Mr Rumbles: What? It does not work.

David McLetchie: It would work a lot better if Mr Rumbles were in it.

The prison service is not perfect. We should try to rehabilitate offenders, but let us not forget that the number 1 priority is the protection of the public. We need honest sentences with limited remission that has to be earned and is not granted automatically. If we are to consider alternatives to prison—as the Justice 1 Committee is—such as community service or tagging, those alternatives must not be regarded as soft options. They must be properly supervised and they must be sanctions in which the public can have confidence; they must act as punishment, as a deterrent and as a road to rehabilitation.

Nowhere is the Executive's failure more apparent than in health. Our centralised

bureaucratic system of health care is failing us all. Choice is the preserve of the few when it should be the right of us all. Most of us have to settle for what is on offer rather than what we would choose for ourselves. There has been extra spending—I acknowledge that. The Executive has completed the Conservative hospital building programme, financed in part by methods that we pioneered and that the Executive once scorned. However, I thank the Executive for that.

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Aside from acknowledging the increased investment in the national health service, will Mr McLetchie commit himself to matching it or is he still fixed on cuts of 20 per cent across the board?

David McLetchie: We are happy to commit ourselves to the planned budgets over the next three years for the totality of the health service. We will combine that with a programme of reform that will deliver better results. We are about giving people value for money and for the taxes that they pay, unlike the Labour party, which, regrettably, has consistently failed to give value for money.

Our health service is failing our patients. It is no wonder that the launch of Mr Chisholm's charter had to be shelved, given that patients are now waiting longer on longer waiting lists, which now have 19,000 more people on them than in 1999. So much for Labour saving the NHS.

Mr Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

David McLetchie: No, I am sorry, but I must move on.

The fact that some patients might have to be shipped overseas in order to receive the treatment that they need in a reasonable time is the ultimate admission of failure on the part of the Minister for Health and Community Care. It would be better if, instead of shipping patients abroad, he went there himself to learn how other countries in western Europe run their systems more effectively than we do in the interests of all their citizens.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): Will the member give way?

David McLetchie: I must make my point, but I will give way in a second.

The problem is that, despite all the evidence piling up that the minister's centralising approach is not working, he prescribes even more of the same medicine.

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): Will the member take an intervention?

David McLetchie: I will take Mr Lyon's intervention first.

The minister's white paper takes centralisation to new lengths by taking power away from hospitals and giving it back to health boards. He is going in exactly the opposite direction from Alan Milburn down south, who is taking the Conservative medicine. As a result of the Executive's approach, Scottish patients will be the losers once again.

George Lyon: Mr McLetchie said that we should look to Europe to discover how things are done. How come the Tories spent less on health provision than the average in the rest of Europe for 20 years, making the health service the mess that it is today?

David McLetchie: If Mr Lyon looks at the figures, he will discover that public sector health spending in Britain is consistently higher. When one brings together all the elements, the totality of health spending is greater. The commonsense thing for any Government to do is to ensure that increasing expenditure is provided by the state and the independent and voluntary sectors to expand the total investment in health care and the services that are available to our citizens.

Malcolm Chisholm: I am bewildered by the fantasy that David McLetchie has created. The vast majority of people in Scotland know that the last Conservative Government was the most centralising Government in the history of this country. Anybody in local government or the health service will tell him that. If he reads the white paper on health, he will know that its central theme is decentralisation, which is the exact opposite of his caricature of our approach.

David McLetchie: What Mr Chisholm says about his white paper proves my point. Labour members are masters of sophistry—they say one thing in writing and do another in practice. The truth of the matter is that it was the Conservative party that established the principle of fundholding. Some 50 per cent of general practitioners were on their way to achieving full fundholding in 1997 until, in an act of ideological vandalism and dogma, the Labour party destroyed a system that was delivering better results for patients and a better deal for the taxpayer. Of that, the Labour party stands guilty.

Let us move on to the next subject, because my time is—

Mr Rumbles: Will the member give way?

David McLetchie: No, I have already responded to three interventions in a row.

Let us face the facts. Our health service needs reform, but we will not get it from our present Administration. In many respects, education faces similar problems. We have a one-size-fits-all system that is supposed to be about equality, but

there is an enormous gulf between the best and the worst-performing schools. Far too many of our pupils are trapped in catchment area prisons. Overwhelmingly, those pupils are in our most deprived communities, which denies them educational opportunities to improve their quality of life.

We know that standards of discipline are falling in our schools. The number of attacks on our teachers is now seven times higher than in 1997—in Scottish schools, there were 5,412 attacks last year alone and there is one attack every 15 minutes of the working day. Headmasters are constrained by Labour's targets to reduce pupil exclusions and they are powerless to remove from the classroom violent and disruptive pupils who cause mayhem. Is it any wonder that so many of our children are unable to read and write properly, as was recently revealed? Mr McConnell and his Executive might promise excellence for all, but the reality is mediocrity or worse for far too many.

We need reform to raise standards and to extend opportunity. We do not need to return to an era when only a select few benefited from high-quality academic education. We can do better than that. We can create a system that caters for the needs of every child. That means giving parents the choice of a diverse range of schools. Nearly 1,000 secondary schools in England specialise in business, engineering, maths, technology, languages, sport and the arts. That number is expected to double by 2006. What is the situation here in Scotland? We have a paltry seven specialist schools with no increase in prospect—what a scandalous poverty of ambition on the part of the Executive. We need a major expansion in the number of specialist secondary schools. Parents should be able to set up their own schools with state funding, as happens in Denmark and the Netherlands. That is the effective way of extending opportunity and choice to pupils and parents in Scotland, irrespective of their backgrounds.

We know that we will be able to do everything that we—all of us in the chamber—want to do in public services if we have a dynamic and competitive economy. Labour's return to tax-and-spend measures and its obsession with regulation threatens to impoverish us all. Business in Britain is struggling with a burden of an extra £15 billion of higher taxes and red tape while the competitive advantage and legacy that Labour inherited from us is being steadily eroded.

We need to create the right environment in Scotland for business by reducing the burden of tax and by cutting red tape. Some people might be aware that the Scottish Executive has a unit that supposedly improves regulation in Scotland. It was the brainchild of Mr McLeish, who christened it

IRIS—the improving regulation in Scotland unit. IRIS recently celebrated her third birthday. Guess how many regulations she has abolished? None. We need in Scotland not an IRIS, but a CURTIS—a determination to cut unnecessary red tape in Scotland. That is what we are pledged to do.

When we were last in government, we worked hard to establish a uniform business rate throughout the UK—a level playing field for all businesses. Along came the Scottish Parliament and along came Labour and our hard-won parity was tossed out the window. Our businesses now pay a rate poundage that is 9 per cent higher than their competitors pay down south.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

David McLetchie: No, I am sorry, I am coming to the end of my speech.

That policy should be reversed as a matter of urgency. We should cut business rates and restore a uniform business rate throughout the United Kingdom.

Let us not forget the much-needed improvements to our roads network, which is essential to our export-oriented economy. Those improvements have been at a standstill—although the Executive is now falling over itself with announcements—thanks to the Executive's roads review. It is time to get Scotland moving again and to make up for lost time. Some of the £250 million that is being squandered in the enterprise budget on consultancy services should be redeved to cutting business rates and to improving transport links. We are determined to focus spending on practical measures to help all businesses in Scotland and not just a select few.

The ultimate irony for the Executive parties must be that their record in government has undermined public confidence in their whole devolution project. People know that they are paying more in taxes. Indeed, the average family in Scotland will be paying an extra £445 a year following the increase in national insurance contributions, the freezing of income tax allowances and the rises in council tax, yet they see very little in return. Far too much of that money is wasted and does not reach the front line of our public services.

That waste and incompetence is epitomised by the Holyrood building project. "Follyrood" will for ever stand as a monument to the past four years of Labour and Liberal Democrat rule. The fact that the cost of the project has risen by £300 million is both a farce and a national scandal and the guilty must be brought to book. The First Minister said that it was the biggest single disappointment of devolution. He was right, but what a brass neck he has. Labour promised that the building would cost

only £40 million, Labour chose the Holyrood site, Labour rejected a fixed-price tender, Labour ruled out the private finance initiative, and Labour MSPs and their Liberal Democrat lackeys voted on four separate occasions in the Parliament to proceed with the project.

Mr Rumbles: Will Mr McLetchie give way?

David McLetchie: The Labour and Liberal Democrat Scottish Government continues to abdicate its responsibility by carrying on and signing the blank cheques—money with which we could and should have built schools, hospitals and roads.

Mr Rumbles: Can Mr McLetchie hear me? Will he give way?

David McLetchie: Do I have time to take an intervention, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think, Mr McLetchie, that you are over time and should bring your remarks to a conclusion. There should be no more interventions.

David McLetchie: Nothing—absolutely nothing—better illustrates why Scotland needs a change of Government than that whole sorry episode. Holyrood is truly Scotland's disgrace.

I shall conclude with a retrospective on 1997 and the whole issue of tax, waste and failure to deliver. Members of the Labour party might like to look again at their 1997 election manifesto, which said:

"The level of public spending is no longer the best measure of the effectiveness of government".

Improvements in our public services were supposed to come about through a twin programme of what was called investment and reform. However, all that Scottish ministers can do in this Parliament is boast about how much they are spending, because there is no programme of reform in Scotland that is worthy of the name.

Scottish Labour is the Status Quo party, strumming the same three chords and wondering why the people do not buy their records any more. On 1 May, people will have a chance to vote for the Scottish Conservatives for a change—a change very much for the better.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that four years of government by Labour and the Liberal Democrats in Scotland have not achieved the better public services and stronger economy that people in both our urban and rural communities were led to expect and believes that Scotland needs an Executive that will undertake a coherent programme of reform designed to boost Scotland's economic performance and improve our public services by reducing the burden of tax and red tape, empowering parents, professionals and local communities and increasing choice and accountability.

09:53

The Minister for Parliamentary Business

(Patricia Ferguson): I had got to about 20 minutes and counted one thing that David McLetchie got right. Then he got into his 20th minute and got his second thing right. Voters will indeed have an opportunity to vote Conservative on 1 May, yet once again they will not do it, because they know that David McLetchie's other correct point was that voters, like the rest of us in the Parliament, have a very long memory. Even if Mr McLetchie chooses to gloss over what went before, we will not allow him to do so.

Why should the attitude of the Conservatives surprise us? As everyone in the chamber knows, the Tories did not want a Scottish Parliament and they campaigned against it. After four years, what do we have? We have a motion that attacks the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition. The motion contains nothing new. It is the same old whingeing motion that we have come to expect from the Tories. In fact, it was probably drafted around 12 September 1997, the day after the Tories failed to stop the referendum victory. They immediately set out to rubbish the Parliament and I am afraid that they just cannot kick that habit.

The Conservative motion attacks the Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive and its record of achievement. The Executive is proud of its record and I believe that it has good reason to be proud. Let us look at that record. By the end of this parliamentary session, the Executive will have introduced 50 bills, every one of which will make a difference to the lives of the people of Scotland. Every one of those bills reflects our concern for our people and none of them would have been introduced if the Tories had had their way and prevented the Parliament from being established.

Indirectly, the Tories have played a part in deciding the Executive's priorities because, if it were not for the Tories' 18 years of flawed policies, we would not have had to introduce those bills. We would not have to invest so heavily to help the unemployed back to work and we not have to invest so massively in education, health and housing.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Patricia Ferguson talks about investment, but does she agree that the way in which the Executive is investing, through the private finance initiative, shows that she endorses Tory policy?

Patricia Ferguson: Absolutely not. Our public investment is not just in capital. A whole lot of other things have to go into making those services work. Unlike the Conservatives, we are not cutting staff for those facilities; we are ensuring that the facilities are adequately staffed. I do not accept what Phil Gallie says at all. What I will say is that—

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Will Patricia Ferguson accept an intervention?

Patricia Ferguson: No. I am talking about the 18 years of Conservative rule and I seem to remember that the SNP had something to do with that.

Andrew Wilson: The Liberals voted Labour out in 1979. The minister should take a look at history.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, Mr Wilson.

Patricia Ferguson: Members on the Executive benches are proud of their history. I am not sure that other members can say the same thing.

It took the Tories 18 years to wreak havoc across our public services. In the six short years that Labour has been in power at Westminster, and in the four years that the coalition has operated here, we have made massive inroads into redressing the damage that the Tories did.

Let us look at our record in more detail. On the economy and jobs, we have created 20,000 modern apprenticeships, one year ahead of schedule. We have frozen the business rate for a year and we have encouraged business through our "A Smart, Successful Scotland" strategy. What did the Tories do? They presided over unemployment rates that twice hit 3 million. How did they react to that shaming fact? They said that it was a price worth paying. What are they suggesting they will do now—if they ever get a chance, that is? They will take £250 million out of the enterprise network, as Mr McLetchie confirmed this morning, and spend it on transport. That is more than half Scottish Enterprise's budget and more than Scottish Enterprise can spend annually on skills.

On health, we have introduced free nursing and personal care for our older people, helping 75,000 of our most vulnerable Scots. We are investing £100 million over four years in the health improvement fund and we have recruited 1,400 more doctors and nurses. What did the Tories do? By 1997, residents in my city of Glasgow were 66 per cent more likely to die prematurely than people living in rural Dorset were. At the same time, the number of nurses in Scotland reduced by 8,490 between 1989 and 1997.

I should tell Mr McLetchie that I worked in the health service for many years during the Conservatives' period in office and I do not recognise the picture of the NHS that he paints. The picture that most of us who worked in the health service at that time saw was one where patients did not get the treatment that they wanted, where the bureaucracy was overwhelming and where, from day to day, we did not know where the next reform was coming from. Well, we did know that—it came from the Conservatives—

but we did not know how it would make a difference to our working lives.

David McLetchie: Will Patricia Ferguson give way?

Patricia Ferguson: I will give way in a moment.

If the past of the NHS under the Tories was bad, what would its future be like? We know that they want to break up the health service and that, given the opportunity, that would be their priority. Conservative members are not contradicting that.

David McLetchie: That is because the minister will not accept an intervention.

Patricia Ferguson: Mr McLetchie may intervene if he wishes.

David McLetchie: I would like to ask the minister two things. First, will she confirm that there were more nurses in Scotland in total in 1995 than there are today? Secondly, if she thinks that we are busy trying to privatise the health service by seeking to establish foundation hospitals here in Scotland, does she think that Mr Milburn is privatising the NHS in England and Wales?

Patricia Ferguson: The figure that I quoted answers Mr McLetchie's first question. In Scotland, the number of nurses reduced by more than 8,000 between 1989 and 1997.

David McLetchie: There were more in 1995.

Patricia Ferguson: If David McLetchie wants to quote figures from a particular year, he can do that when he is speaking. I will quote from the Conservative's health spokesperson, Liam Fox, who operates for the Conservatives at Westminster. He said:

"We've got a problem in this country where the NHS and health care have been synonymous. We're here to break that."

I have news for him; we will not let the Conservatives do that.

David McLetchie: What about Mr Milburn?

Patricia Ferguson: In education—

David McLetchie: What about Mr Milburn?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. There is a difference between making witty interjections and sledging. This is becoming a bit of a sustained barracking.

Patricia Ferguson: In education, we have provided a nursery place for every three and four-year old whose parents want that place. We have guaranteed class sizes of 30 or less for all five, six and seven-year-olds. For the first time, more than half of Scotland's school leavers now go into further or higher education.

The Tories invested money in a bureaucratic nursery voucher scheme instead of increasing nursery places. The other thing that they did in

education was to introduce the assisted places scheme.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Executive claims to have guaranteed nursery places. How does that square with Labour-controlled East Lothian Council's saying that it cannot guarantee the nursery places that the minister talks about?

Patricia Ferguson: A colleague behind me has just remarked that it is interesting that, as soon as we mention the assisted places scheme, we have an intervention from Mr Monteith—I would not want to comment on that. The information that we have from East Lothian Council is that it says no such thing about its ability to provide nursery places. Perhaps Mr Monteith should go back and check his source.

On transport, we have introduced free local off-peak bus travel for our older people. We are investing £690 million in a package of improvements to Scotland's motorway and trunk road network over three years. Also important is the fact that we are investing money in road safety schemes to cut the number of children killed in traffic accidents. What did the Tories do? Not a lot, surprisingly enough. In fact, in their last year in government, they reduced to zero the number of grants that they gave to local authorities for public transport.

On crime, we have introduced new measures against anti-social neighbours, we have taken powers to allow the confiscation of the profits of criminals who deal in drugs and we are implementing a range of new measures to tackle youth crime, which is a blight in so many of our communities. What did the Tories do? They tried to block attempts to remove handguns from society. Moreover, recorded crime rose by 42 per cent under the Conservatives.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the minister take an intervention?

Patricia Ferguson: No thank you.

By any comparison, I think that the Executive's record is good, but by comparison with the Tories' record over 18 years it is excellent. I believe that what we have done is only a start, which an incoming Administration will be able to build on, because there is still a lot to do. There is still a lot to do in social justice, health and education, but the Executive knows what it wants to do and what its priorities are. The SNP's idea of divorce from the rest of the UK, with all the instability and danger that that would bring, is not for us and certainly not for us is the 20 per cent cut in spending on public services that the Conservatives would impose.

We want to continue to make real investment in our public services, which is possible only

because of the economic stability of the United Kingdom and which would not be possible if the nationalist dream of divorce were ever realised. We want more nurses, teachers and police officers. That would not be possible if the Tories' plan to cut investment in those services were ever realised.

I am sure no one in the chamber has forgotten what it was like to live under a Tory Government. There were—to name but a few things—the poll tax, massive unemployment and high mortgage rates. As I said, the Tories have, in spite of themselves, helped to shape the agenda of the Parliament because of the pressing need to reverse the effect that they had on our country.

The Tories are also responsible for a whole lot more. They are responsible for creating a whole generation of new political activists, many of whom are sitting in the Parliament—people such as me who would never have dreamed of joining a political party if they had not experienced Conservative government at first hand. Collectively, we have a vision of the Scotland that we want. We want a Scotland where all our children can achieve to the best of their potential, where our old people and our sick receive the best possible care, where people have meaningful work and where our old people are not afraid to leave their homes at night. We want a Scotland where pensioners can put on their central heating timer to coincide with their return home after having used their free bus pass to pick up their grandchildren from their free nursery places. We have worked hard to make progress towards our goals and we will continue to do that. We have done a lot, but there is a lot more to do.

I move amendment S1M-3986.2, to leave out from "not achieved" to end and insert:

"delivered a clear record of achievement which includes, amongst many other accomplishments, a full legislative programme and Executive action in urban and rural areas that has led to record investment in the health service, the abolition of tuition fees, the introduction of free personal care for older people, nursery places for all three- and four-year-olds whose parents want them, record numbers of police, an increase in the seizure of class 'A' drugs by 173%, freezing business rates, rates relief for small businesses and a substantial programme for long-term investment in transport; notes that Scotland has achieved the lowest level of unemployment for 25 years, and further believes that the next Parliament will have every opportunity to build upon the foundations laid in this first session for a prosperous, confident Scotland."

10:05

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): I apologise to the Presiding Officer and Mr McLetchie for my slightly late arrival.

So far, the debate seems to have been one between Labour and the Conservative party about

who is more Tory than who. The truth is that the past four years have been four years of failure by the Labour-Lib Dem Executive. It is a marriage of convenience that has been more than inconvenient for the Scottish people. As it prepares to leave office, it leaves behind it a record that makes very depressing reading. Its record shows that it has consistently failed the country and our people across all areas of government.

Let us consider the reality. One in three Scottish children still lives in poverty. The Scottish economy is underperforming and there is low long-term growth. Violent crime, serious assaults, drug crimes and vandalism have all increased since the Executive came to power. Under the Executive, large class sizes mean that our schools cannot deliver the best education to children in their formative years and, because of a lack of staff and a lack of beds, people are waiting too long for medical treatment.

Scotland is a rich country. It is blessed with great resources and great potential, but none of that potential is being realised. The Executive has had its four years; it is time for it to make way for real ambition.

First, let us look at the junior partners in the Executive. We need only compare the Lib Dem rhetoric before the last election with the reality to see how their thirst for power has overcome any thirst for justice or for the real improvements to their lives that the people of Scotland need.

The Lib Dems promised to abolish tuition fees, but all that they did was back-end instead of front-end the fees and hope that no one would notice. They promised to introduce maximum waiting times; they stated that they would

“identify firm limits for waiting times in every specialty.”

The reality is that waiting times have increased by 16 per cent, waiting lists are up 10,000 and 85,000 fewer people are being treated by the NHS than in 1999.

Mr Rumbles: Does the SNP accept the fact that the Scottish Executive paid the £3,000-plus tuition fees lock, stock and barrel?

Roseanna Cunningham: I recognise that the Scottish Executive thinks that people are stupid enough to believe that if they pay afterwards instead of ahead of the game, that somehow means that they are not paying. That might be the way that Mike Rumbles runs his finances, but it is not the way that the rest of us do.

The Lib Dems promised to reform prisons and, specifically, to cut prisoner numbers. The most recently released figures show that the average prison population in Scotland has reached an all-time high.

Tolls on the Skye bridge are still in place. Charges for eye and dental checks are still in place, despite the fact that the Lib Dems said that that was their first priority in a national health screening scheme. I notice that that pledge may make it back into their manifesto.

People might suggest that the Lib Dems should save some money and reissue their 1999 manifesto, as clearly not much has changed. Of course, they cannot do that because what has changed is their former commitment to proportional representation. That must be their most baffling achievement of the past four years. Most of us thought that if they stood for anything, they stood for PR. However, astonishingly, they failed to support Tricia Marwick’s bill to introduce PR for local government. They had a chance to vote for PR when it counted and they bottled it. If they are prepared to ditch that commitment, what would they not sell out? Perhaps they should list in their manifesto the things that they have no real intention of pursuing any more.

I see that some of the Tories are sniggering at the Lib Dems—I grant that it is easy to do. However, while Labour and the Lib Dems have failed Scotland, the Tories have a cheek to criticise anybody else’s record of governance in Scotland. The Tories are the party that brought us the poll tax and 18 years of Thatcherism, introduced privatisation into the public sector and destroyed our country’s economic base. Despite David McLetchie’s sweeping description of the establishment in this chamber, the truth is that the Conservative party is in administration in Perth and Kinross Council only because it is in coalition with Labour there. That is the real coalition that is beginning to emerge across the country. Scotland has not forgotten—and will never forget—what Tory rule means, which is precisely why the Tories are flat-lining in the opinion polls.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): Why then does the SNP sustain Labour in power in Dumfries and Galloway?

Roseanna Cunningham: On the evidence of Patricia Ferguson’s example this morning, the plan is to bore the electorate into submission in the upcoming election. Labour somewhat belatedly kicked off its election campaign with a document that boasted of “Four Years, Forty Real Achievements”, but all it did was expose the failure of the Labour party. In truth, the record is not so much top 40 but top of the flops. Even the most cursory examination shows up that document as nothing more than a collection of weasel words and a litany of lies, which is what we have come to expect from the Labour party.

People cannot trust the Labour party. Crime is up, but rates of prosecution are down. People feel the truth of that and, consequently, confidence in

our criminal justice system is eroding rapidly. On health, Labour crows that it has guaranteed new jobs for all new nurses and midwives, but there are 1,869 nursing vacancies in our hospitals, which is an increase of 12 per cent on last year and 46 per cent since new Labour came to power in 1999. Meanwhile, the drop-out rate for student nurses is one in four—it is easy to guarantee jobs for new recruits if one knows that one has not recruited anywhere near enough in the first place. Labour should try offering a decent wage and see whether that makes a difference.

On the economy, Labour claims that unemployment is down by a quarter to its lowest level in 25 years, but the fact is that massive levels of unemployment in Glasgow, Dundee, Lanarkshire and elsewhere are concealed within the headline figures. Those figures do not include the massive numbers of people who are excluded because, instead of signing on, they receive other state benefits. Labour politicians used to complain about the Tories' fiddled figures, but they have learned more than one lesson from the Tories.

Scotland has suffered decades of low growth and relative economic decline. We are a nation of huge potential, but our economy is structurally geared for low growth and our most disadvantaged communities are paying the price for that underperformance. Labour knows that it has failed Scotland on the economy and that only the SNP has the policies to release Scotland's economic potential—the Labour party has admitted that to itself and it should admit it to the Scottish people.

It is a pity that the First Minister is not here, because the Scottish Executive's record is very much Jack McConnell's record. He is the longest-serving—perhaps that should be “surviving”—Labour member of the Cabinet and, as he is First Minister and former Minister for Finance and Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs, the buck for much that is wrong in Scotland must stop with him. His sticky fingerprints are all over the Executive's successive failures—it is too late for him to plead that it was not him, he was not there. He might not be in the chamber very often—he has obviously been taking lessons from Tony Blair on how to deal with parliamentary chambers—but he has been at the heart of the Executive all along. His culpability is self-evident.

In Patricia Ferguson's amendment, the Executive has managed to distil the 327 so-called policy commitments in the Executive's glossy document “Recording Our Achievements” and the Labour party's “Four Years, Forty Real Achievements” down to what it presumably believes to be the top 10 from its top of the flops. The amendment claims

“record investment in the health service”,

but with waiting lists and waiting times soaring, patients would be right to ask where that money is going. The amendment mentions free personal care for the elderly but, as I recall, some members of the Labour party had to be dragged kicking and screaming into supporting that policy, which was a victory for the Parliament, not the Executive.

The amendment mentions nursery places, but in Scotland parents still pay for 75 per cent of their child care overall, compared with 17 per cent in Sweden, 20 per cent in Spain and 15 per cent in Finland. The amendment states that there are “record numbers of police”, but we should consider the facts: in December 1997, there were 15,050 police officers in Scotland and, by June 2002, there were 15,324. It is true that that is a marginal increase, but it should be compared to the figure of more than 16,000 that there will be when the SNP forms the Government.

The amendment mentions “freezing business rates” and

“rates relief for small businesses”,

but when Jack McConnell was Minister for Finance, he increased business taxes twice.

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con):

Given the member's previously expressed liking for the Liberal Democrats, does she rule out joining the Liberal Democrats in a future coalition, if the SNP were the largest party after the election?

Roseanna Cunningham: I would be astonished to discover that I have ever indicated a liking for the Liberal Democrats. Members would be wise to wait for the results of the election before making coalition agreements.

The Executive amendment also claims

“a substantial programme for long-term investment in transport”,

but, of course, a programme is not delivery. Hundreds of millions of pounds of public money left the railways as private profit under the Tories' failed privatisation project. Devolution gave the Scottish Executive the responsibility for funding trains but not for the rails on which they run—a better metaphor for the whole devolution settlement would be hard to find.

Perhaps the Executive's biggest and most significant failure is its apparent indifference to the almost despairing response of the people of Scotland to the Executive's performance. Time after time we see evidence that ordinary people feel desperately let down—and so they should. The Executive gives no indication that it gives a damn, which is the most damning indictment of all.

In contrast, the SNP has consistently won the debate on fiscal autonomy for Scotland by having

“a clearer, stronger and more consistent”

economic message than the Labour party’s. It was heartening to know that people within the Labour party recognise that point; it is a pity that we will not hear a similar recognition on the record in the chamber. The SNP is winning the argument and the Labour party knows it. According to an NFO System Three poll last year, 70 per cent of Scots want financial independence; that call for full financial freedom has been backed by leading voices in Scottish academia. The Labour party cannot afford to ignore such voices and Scotland cannot afford to wait much longer.

The Tory motion notes:

“four years of government by Labour and the Liberal Democrats in Scotland have not achieved the better public services and stronger economy that people in both our urban and rural communities were led to expect”,

which is true. However, having identified the problem, the Tories fail to propose the obvious solution, which is to give the Parliament the powers that it needs: the powers of a normal parliament in a normal nation to shape its own future. That is why my amendment recognises that “a change of government is essential to reverse the decline in public services”,

and expresses the belief that

“only with the normal powers of an independent Parliament will Scotland be able to release its full potential.”

I move amendment S1M-3986.1, to leave out from “notes” to end and insert:

“regrets that four years of government by Labour and the Liberal Democrats in Scotland have failed to improve on the disastrous record of 18 years of Conservative rule; notes that since the Labour/Liberal Executive came to power, hospital waiting lists have grown longer, violent crime has risen, one in three children live in poverty and the economy has recorded the lowest level of growth anywhere in the European Union; recognises that a change of government is essential to reverse the decline in public services, and believes that only with the normal powers of an independent Parliament will Scotland be able to release its full potential.”

10:16

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I remind members of the 18 years of failure by successive Tory Governments and the legacy those Governments left in Scotland. It is clear from David McLetchie’s speech that the Tories, to a man, have succumbed to amnesia about everything that took place before 1997, which was year zero for the Tories. We must highlight the legacy of failure because the failure to invest in public services and the transport system, the failure to widen our economic base and the complete failure to tackle the problems of rural Scotland are the starting point in judging the Liberal-Labour coalition’s achievements in its first four years in power.

Phil Gallie: Does George Lyon ever travel the roads of Scotland? Has he travelled to the Borders on the M74 or on the dual carriageway up to Aberdeen, which were Tory infrastructure improvements? Can he tell me of one new road that the Executive has provided since it came to office?

George Lyon: We all remember the privatisation of the railways.

The Liberal-Labour coalition is investing record sums in Scotland’s national health service—the real-terms growth of more than 6 per cent a year is unprecedented in modern times and the £7.3 billion of health spend next year will put Scotland above the European average. The coalition has recruited 572 extra doctors, 840 extra nurses and 77 more dentists since 1999 and £100 million is being invested in health promotion to tackle the causes of ill health rather than treat the symptoms. That long-term investment will take time to pay off, but it is important if we are to improve Scotland’s appalling health record. This year, 75,000 older people will receive free personal care—a flagship policy of the coalition.

We should contrast that record of investing in and rebuilding the NHS with the Tory legacy of failure. Under the Tories, 50,000 nurses left the NHS, but the creation of the internal market resulted in a 22 per cent increase in the number of managers.

Andrew Wilson: Is it traditional for coalition partners to try to sink their own flagship, which Labour members tried to do during the course of the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Bill?

George Lyon: The power and influence that the Liberal Democrats have had in the coalition are highlighted by the fact that it is a flagship policy of the coalition.

Iain Duncan Smith—whom members would be delighted to welcome to Scotland on a regular basis, apart from his Scottish Tory colleagues—knows that the Tory health spokesman, Dr Liam Fox, gave the game away at the Tory party conference in April 2002 when he revealed a four-phase strategy to undermine the national health service, which would lead to patients’ having to pay for their health care. That is the Tories’ real agenda—abandoning the principle of making health care free at the point of delivery, as David McLetchie confirmed again this morning. It is time that they were honest about that.

The Liberal-Labour coalition has invested heavily in our children’s education, providing pre-school places for every three and four-year-old. We have recruited 738 extra teachers and 1,500 extra staff and, as part of the McCrone deal, an extra 4,000 teachers will be recruited and teachers will receive a 20 per cent increase in their salaries.

We will also have tackled the Tory legacy of crumbling and run down schools. Whereas we saw £1 billion of underinvestment under the Tories, last year phase 1 of our £1.15 billion school building programme was announced by the Minister for Education and Young People, Cathy Jamieson. Phase 2 will be announced shortly. That is a record investment in our children's education and future.

Fiona Hyslop: Does the member agree that it is very important to have smaller class sizes, especially for our younger pupils? Does he also agree that the problem with PFI projects is the fact that the schools are not built with more classrooms to allow smaller classes? Finally, does he agree that the only way in which we can ensure that we have the schools that our children need is to have them built not for profit, so that the privateers are driven out of our education system?

George Lyon: The fact of the matter is that, under the SNP—the so-called business-friendly party—that £1.15 billion programme would be abandoned. The SNP has stated on the record that it would allow no PFI projects and that they would all be pulled. The SNP does not like to have the private sector involved in the public sector. I do not understand how the SNP could deliver smaller class sizes if it abandoned that school building programme.

The Liberal-Labour coalition has also improved the lot of Scottish students by abolishing tuition fees. It is interesting that Roseanna Cunningham did not reject that idea. Scottish students are no longer required to pay university fees directly to the universities; it is the Scottish Executive that now pays tuition fees. We have also brought back student grants. Student support in Scotland is now among the best in Europe, which has led to 60,000 extra students entering further education during the life of the Parliament. Scotland is leading the way in student support and students are voting with their feet. Indeed, last year, for the first time, 50 per cent of school leavers in Scotland entered further education. Unlike the Tories, the Liberal Democrats will not be part of a coalition Government that introduces top-up fees for students in Scotland.

The coalition has also introduced free travel and concessionary fares on buses and ferries for our pensioners and we are investing a record £1.2 billion in improving and renewing our transport infrastructure, reversing years of underfunding and decline under the Tories. Voters have a long memory, and the Tories will continue to be haunted for years to come by their failed privatisation of the railways. That was a victory for ideological dogma over common sense and sound public policy. Every time that a train is late, there are leaves on the tracks or there is a major

accident on our railways, the general public will be reminded of the words of the former Railtrack director, Gerald Corbett, who stated that the railways were "ripped apart at privatisation", with the resulting structure designed to maximise the proceeds to the Treasury rather than safety or investment for the passengers. That is a damning indictment of the Tories' track record on transport.

The coalition has tackled crime and the fear of crime in our streets. Police numbers in Scotland are at a record high. We now have 648 more police officers than when the coalition came to power; detection rates are twice as high in Scotland as in England and Wales; and the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency, which was set up by the Executive to tackle drug dealing, has reported a 68 per cent increase in drug seizures and a 35 per cent increase in arrests.

Murdo Fraser: Will Mr Lyon take an intervention?

George Lyon: I would like to make some progress.

To make people feel safer in their communities, we have funded 50 additional closed-circuit television schemes, with 2,000 extra cameras. Last year, a record £933 million was spent on our police forces so that our communities would not only be safer but feel safer. The coalition will also invest a record £24 million in ensuring that our courts deliver justice quickly and efficiently. That track record on tackling crime on our streets demonstrates the fact that the Liberal-Labour coalition is making the difference when it comes to making our streets safer, in contrast to the failure of the Tory years.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): If we have all those additional police officers and if the detection rates are up, how come the prosecution levels have fallen dramatically?

George Lyon: The record is there. We have increased the number of police officers on the streets and detection rates in Scotland are twice as high as in England and Wales. When the Tories left office, there were 75,000 more crimes every year than when they took over. Their record on youth crime makes even grimmer reading. Of all the young offenders who were released from custody in 1995, an astonishing 60 per cent reoffended within two years. They were born under the Tories, they offended under the Tories, they were imprisoned and released under the Tories, and they reoffended under the Tories. So much for throwing them in jail being the way to cure youth crime.

The coalition has ensured that the concerns of the people who live in rural areas have been at the heart of Government policy and thinking. The historic Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 has

tackled head on the national scandal of the few rich—and often absentee—individuals owning the majority of Scotland's land and blocking development in many of our rural communities. By giving crofters, communities and tenant farmers the right to buy, the coalition has empowered the ordinary men and women who live and work on Scotland's land and has reduced the power and influence of the absent few. That approach contrasts with the approach of the Tories—the landlords' lapdogs and defenders of the power and influence of the absent few day after day in the chamber. Is it any wonder that the people of Scotland continue to reject Iain Duncan Smith's Tories at the ballot box time after time?

The Liberal-Labour coalition has a strong track record of delivering in the first four years of the Parliament. The appalling legacy of failure that was left behind by the Tories and, unfortunately, continued by our Labour colleagues in their first two years in power as they stuck to the Tories' spending plans, is now being reversed. By entering into a coalition with our Labour colleagues, the Liberal Democrats have ensured that Scotland's new Parliament has had a strong and stable Government in its first term—a Government that has begun the long process of rebuilding our public services and our transport infrastructure. I am sure that I speak for my fellow Liberal Democrats when I say that we are proud to have been part of Scotland's first Government in 300 years and proud to have delivered our manifesto pledges and made the difference. I support the Executive's amendment.

10:28

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

After listening to that brilliant speech by George Lyon, I wonder when he last listened to people in Argyll and Bute about the state of the roads, the health service and education. They are certainly not singing from the same hymn sheet as he is.

The Government's own figures from its information and statistics division, which were published last week, have confirmed the differences between the situation at the start of the Parliament and the situation now. The total NHS waiting list is up by more than 18,000 and the median waiting time has increased by 10 days. The percentages of patients who are seen within nine, 13 and 26 weeks are all down by an average of 10 per cent. The total number of out-patients seen, including those on the deferred list, has fallen by more than 83,000; the number of emergency in-patients seen is down by 561; the number of elective in-patients seen is down by 7,945; and the number of day cases is down by 14,899.

Unlike George Lyon, who would get 0 per cent for his homework, I have done my homework and I

am quoting the Executive's figures, which have cost taxpayers an extra £2 billion. The recent Executive document "Recording Our Achievements" should be renamed "Cataloguing Our Disasters".

I will raise several other points in the time that I have left. The first one is on public health, which can work in a fully co-ordinated manner in an integrated programme only if inputs and outputs are fully held to account. A coalition promise on page 70 of "Recording Our Achievements" is:

"We will ensure that all schools have a sports co-ordinator by 2003."

However, in the next column, in a paragraph on progress on that promise, the Executive states that the promise

"May not be achieved"

because

"not all local authorities provide the required match funding."

That is another Labour failure.

Hospital-acquired infections cost the health service £186 million and take up 11 per cent of hospital beds. How often have we heard Labour, Liberal and SNP MSPs say in the chamber that that rise is due to contracting out? However, nothing could be further from the truth. A written answer on 7 February from the Minister for Health and Community Care showed that of the 31 hospital trusts in Scotland, 24 have in-house contracts for cleaning; another five trusts mainly have in-house contracts, but each of those trusts has at least one hospital that has contracted out; and only two hospital trusts have fully contracted out their cleaning services.

The two bodies that have contracted out are Grampian Primary Care NHS Trust and NHS Shetland and both have hospitals that are in the top NHS category in Scotland for cleanliness. In category 1 are the Royal Aberdeen children's hospital, Aberdeen maternity hospital, Aberdeen royal infirmary, Aberdeen city hospital and the Royal Cornhill hospital. The hospitals that are the best in Scotland for cleanliness are those that have contracted out their cleaning services.

Like other MSPs in the Highlands, I welcomed the increased Arbutnott funding. The Highlands got the highest increase in Scotland and were the biggest gainer. However, all the money that the Highlands were given has gone to balancing the books and reducing the year-end financial deficit. Not one penny went to service development or to tackling poverty deprivation and improving equality of access.

On the patients charter, the Minister for Health and Community Care spoke last week in the

chamber about the report "Partnership for Care: Scotland's Health White Paper" and said that patients' interests are at the heart of the health service. Under the Tories, patients' interests were at the heart of the health service when we launched the patients charter in 1991. Labour ignored the patients charter from 1997 and the patients charter that was launched last week has been cancelled—I wonder why.

The television advertisements in Scotland about drugs and alcohol abuse ask parents to be more sensitive, tolerant and understanding when their children have a drugs problem. We all assume that services exist to support those who have drugs and alcohol problems. However, when families in the Highlands seek advice and support for their sons and daughters who have heroin and alcohol addictions, the support is simply not available. I was pleased that Mary Mulligan met parents in Inverness this week. She heard a parent say, "When I went along to ask for help, advice and support, they took away any hope I ever had." When alcoholics turn up for detoxification and rehabilitation, they are turned away if they smell of drink—but alcoholics sometimes do smell of drink. They are told to come back in a few weeks, when a place might be available. However, in Moray, they are told to come back in six months. Despite the increase of £2 billion in health spending, matters are definitely not getting better under the Liberal-Labour coalition in Scotland.

10:34

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): It strikes me as being richly ironic that a party that has the appalling record of having promoted the maximum amount of social and economic dislocation between 1979 and 1997 should presume to upbraid successor Governments in Scotland and Westminster. However, it will come as no surprise to the people of Scotland that the Tories retain the same purblind arrogance that characterised their period in office and that ensured that they were, properly, reduced to the insignificant rump that exhibits itself in the chamber today.

In the whole of Mr McLetchie's somewhat self-regarding contribution there was not the merest hint of an apology for the Tories' years of misrule and not the slightest acknowledgement that what they put the citizens of Scotland and the UK through was in any way a mistake. According to Mr Merry Mac McLetchie, we should accept his comic-cuts version of history at face value.

In Mr McLetchie's Orwellian rewriting of history, mass unemployment is merely a part of a vibrant free-market economy and the poll tax must be defended with no word of apology offered.

Underneath Mr McLetchie's practised urbanity is an attitude that indicates that he would abolish the devolved Scottish Parliament if he were given half a chance to do so.

Phil Gallie: Bill Butler referred to economic dislocation. Is it not the case that his Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, who has provided the funds for the Scottish Administration, inherited the most magnificent of economic scenarios when Labour came to power, as was acknowledged by Tony Blair in 1997? Does Bill Butler still have confidence in Mr Brown, given that his budget has been put on hold and that we are all awaiting disastrous news?

Bill Butler: I thank Mr Gallie for his succinct point. It is obvious that he is as much a fan of George Orwell as Mr McLetchie is. Let us get one thing straight—the Labour-led Scottish Executive and its Westminster partner will take no lessons from the Tories about Labour's record. Of course, our record is by no means perfect. No members should pretend that their parties have a monopoly on wisdom. However, unlike the Conservatives, who have a dismal catalogue of failure, we have nothing of which to be ashamed. Holyrood, in partnership with Westminster, has reduced unemployment by 25 per cent and it is at its lowest level for a quarter of a century.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Bill Butler: No.

Inflation and interest rates are at a record low. We can contrast that with the previous Conservative regime, which presided over interest rates that were 15 per cent in 1988 and above 10 per cent for four years. Under the Tories, too, inflation ran at 10 per cent and we had the two worst recessions since the second world war.

Today we hear from the Tories no hint of contrition for their record—there is only a deafening silence. There is no acknowledgement that lives were wasted and that potential was left untapped. Let me tell our Tory parliamentarians a truth that they might find unpalatable but which is nevertheless salutary. The people of Scotland and the UK have neither forgotten nor forgiven the Tories for 18 years of ineptitude, which was laced with an overweening certitude. I believe that too much hurt was done to too many people for it ever to be forgotten.

That does not mean that everything is now perfect, because it is not. The Executive is working hard, with its Westminster partner, to repair the destruction of the Tory years. In terms of the economy, 42,000 young people have entered employment under the new deal. They would have languished on the dole under the Tories. As for the health service, we undoubtedly inherited a complex range of problems from the Tories, but

we are making a serious attempt to invest and to deliver. We will provide an extra £3.2 billion for the health service over the next five years, abolish the internal market and provide 1,400 more nurses and doctors.

Ben Wallace: Will the member give way?

Bill Butler: No. I will not give way to someone who uses Harley Street. I believe in the national health service.

In education, which is the key for unlocking and realising people's potential, 100 schools have been built or refurbished, nursery education has been provided for every three and four-year-old and, for the first time, over 50 per cent of our young people are continuing their studies into further or higher education.

The Tory motion represents a past that never worked and which, except for a privileged few, was never meant to work. I urge members to reject the Tory motion. The voters will certainly reject the Tories on 1 May.

10:39

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): It is difficult and perhaps impossible for any sentient human not to feel some sympathy for the plight of Conservative MSPs, because they are led—if that is the right word—by Iain Duncan Smith. The surprising thing is why they chose to have—

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Will the member give way?

Fergus Ewing: I will not do so just now, but I will give way later to Sir James Douglas-Hamilton. [MEMBERS: "Lord James."] I am sorry that I demoted him.

Why, instead of a leader, did they choose an acronym? Who knows what IDS is? What does he stand for? Could it be "in dire straits"? The prospects of the Conservatives getting anywhere in Scotland seem about as likely as those of hearing an extempore speech in the Parliament from George Lyon. It is absolutely clear that the Scottish Conservatives have no prospect of success. They are the Eddie the Eagle of Scottish politics. They are going nowhere, no one is interested in what they say and no one understands their message. They have no relevance to the people of Scotland and no chance at the forthcoming election.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The leader of our party in this Parliament is David McLetchie, and under devolution we can form our own policies, which are not necessarily the same as those south of the border. Two examples of such policies are the abolition of tuition fees and free personal care.

Fergus Ewing: I did not expect a ringing endorsement of confidence in IDS from Lord James, and we did not get one. I wait with interest to see whether IDS will be unleashed on the Scottish electorate during the campaign, given reports that he is to be kept in a cupboard somewhere, away from the Scottish voters. That is a very wise decision, in my opinion.

I want to talk about the total failure of this Executive to tackle the real problems in rural Scotland. Let us look at the mainstays of the economy. We see the fishing industry facing what is without doubt the worst crisis in history, as a result of the total failure of the UK to stand up for Scottish fishermen. The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, exemplified that failure in an article in the *Daily Record* on 4 December, in which he said that 14,000 jobs in Scotland were dependent on fishing, whereas, in fact, there are about 44,000. Tony Blair got it wrong by a factor of 300 per cent, which serves only to show his total lack of commitment to the fishing industry in Scotland.

We were promised an aquaculture strategy, but instead have a framework document that says nothing and gives no commitment. The reason for that is that the Executive is scared of the small number of incessant critics of the aquaculture industry. Rather than recognise the huge potential of that industry and give it support, the Executive undermines it, despite the fact that its standards have improved—so much that Scottish farmed salmon has won the distinction of the Label Rouge in France.

Rather than have a forward-looking forestry policy, the Executive practices studied inertia. It has totally failed to prepare the way for the wall of wood that we will see over the next few years.

Farming policies are not really formulated here; policy decisions made here are seen only as policies from a north-British outpost of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, as Jim Walker, former president of the National Farmers Union of Scotland, has pointed out again and again. All the major decisions are made by DEFRA, and there are worrying times ahead as we anticipate the prospect of Margaret Beckett and Lord Whitty, rather than Scottish ministers, making decisions on the decoupling of the common agricultural policy.

That situation can change only if, after 1 May, we have a Scottish Executive that will stand up for Scotland on every occasion—including standing up to the ministers at Westminster who have sold out our rural economy in the past four years.

Responsibility for the Holyrood project rests with the Labour party. The decision to go ahead with it was made by Donald Dewar, but it was ratified in June 1999 by every Labour MSP and by most

Liberal MSPs, despite the fact that Donald Dewar rejected advice about the site, the contractor and the architect. That project surely is a Lib-Lab folly. It is their responsibility, and that will become absolutely clear at the forthcoming election.

10:44

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): It appears that the true Tory agenda is now being revealed. The Conservative party remains opposed to devolution—

Mary Scanlon: Where did that come from?

Iain Smith: Mr McLetchie stated that quite clearly at the start of his speech. He said that he considered devolution to be a failure, which means that he must be opposed to it.

The Conservative party seeks a two-tier, partly privatised health service and a two-tier education system. When Tories talk about decentralisation, they mean taking more power away from directly elected and accountable councils and giving that power to unaccountable quangos. The Tories want to remove education from local government control, which equates to taking power from local government. Would such a move lead to better decisions being made and an increase in local accountability? No; it would mean that decisions about budgets and whether schools get money for capital investment would be taken not by local councils that are accountable to communities but by—

Murdo Fraser: Head teachers.

Iain Smith: No, not by head teachers and not by communities but by Scottish Executive ministers, as they would have to allocate the budgets. That is not decentralisation; it is centralisation. Tory decentralisation always means putting more power in the hands of fewer people.

Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con): Would Iain Smith like to quote the sources on which his assertions are based, as we do not recognise them?

Iain Smith: How else would the budgets be funded? Who would provide the budgets for local schools? Would schools be able to raise their own money? Would they be able to tax people in order to secure funding? Someone would have to pay for the budgets and that someone would be the Scottish Executive rather than local councils. I consider that to be centralisation, not decentralisation.

However, the debate is supposed to be about the record of the Liberal Democrat and Labour partnership Government. We have made major progress and I am proud of that record. I know that there is a lot more to be done and that

improvements must be made to our health service and our schools. However, we cannot be expected to undo the damage of 18 years of Conservative rule in four years.

Between 1995-96 and 1996-97, the Conservatives cut 4.4 per cent from education budgets in Scotland and left schools with a repairs backlog of £1.3 billion. Between 1979 and 1997, they cut the number of teachers by 6,000. How on earth could we have solved such major problems in our education system in the four years that we have had so far? We have made a start. We have started to invest money, which has enabled us to increase the number of teachers and deal with the backlog of repairs to our schools. However, much remains to be done.

Mr Monteith: Would the member accept that the official statistics show that overall education spending increased by 15 per cent in real terms during the 18 years of Conservative Government and that although, due to falling school rolls, the number of teachers was reduced, the teacher to pupil ratio increased, thus improving standards in education?

Iain Smith: The figures show that, during the final years of Conservative rule, education budgets were cut left, right and centre. That caused many of the problems that we now face in our schools.

David Mundell: Iain Smith is making things up.

Iain Smith: I am not making things up. The figures show that there was a 4.4 per cent cut in cash terms in the education budget in the last two years of the Conservative Government, which represents a greater cut in real terms.

Student support was cut 13 times by the Conservative Government. We have abolished tuition fees in Scotland. No Scottish student pays for tuition in a Scottish university. Their tuition fees are paid directly by the Scottish Executive.

Mary Scanlon: They pay in the end, though.

Iain Smith: They do not. Not a penny of the graduate endowment goes towards the tuition of any Scottish student; it goes towards the £2,000 maintenance grant that was introduced by the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration. The Tories do not want to admit that, but it is a fact.

Andrew Wilson: If that is the case, why did Wendy Alexander, the former Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, say on Radio Scotland this week that the graduate endowment goes directly to pay for higher education costs in Scotland?

Iain Smith: It does not go directly to pay for higher education costs in Scotland; it goes towards the maintenance grants of future generations who will go to university. Not a penny of it goes to universities.

Of course, the Conservatives do not want to talk about that matter because they support top-up fees. As Brian Monteith said:

"If St Andrews and other Scottish universities are to remain in the premier league ... to fund this, they may require the best universities to charge top-up fees, as in the case of Harvard and Yale".

I point out to members that those places charge up to £20,000 a year in top-up fees.

Ben Wallace: Iain Smith has made that up, as well.

Iain Smith: I have not made it up; it is a quote from Brian Monteith. The Conservatives' policy is that they do not want fees—they want top-up fees instead.

In the final three years of the Conservative Government, local government budgets were axed, yet council tax was increased by 25 per cent. That is the record of the Conservative Government. The Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive's record is the abolition of tuition fees, the introduction of free personal care for the elderly, the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, record numbers of police and more investment in education, health and local government. That is a good record and one that I will be happy to defend in the election campaign.

10:49

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): The Tory motion calls for

"an Executive that will undertake a coherent programme of reform designed to boost Scotland's economic performance and improve our public services by reducing the burden of tax and red tape".

Did the Tories not have 18 years to do that? Did they not have 18 years of abject failure on those issues?

The first thing that the debate reinforces is the Scottish Conservative party's astonishing brass neck, typified best by their year-zero approach. I correct Mr McLetchie: he was not the first to use that term in the chamber. I think that my colleague Brian Fitzpatrick used it with regard to the Tory party in a previous debate, so Mr McLetchie is not its author.

The Tory record is one of 18 years of economic vandalism, 18 years in which industries and communities throughout Scotland were devastated and 18 years in which the country saw the two worst recessions since the second world war. As Patricia Ferguson pointed out, unemployment soared above 3 million, even using the claimant count figures. For the people of Scotland, the Conservatives have nothing to contribute. That is reflected in their continued rejection.

Mary Scanlon rose—

Bristow Muldoon: I wish to continue a bit further. I will take an intervention later.

My speech will focus on transport. The Tories starved local government of finance, which resulted in the deterioration of our roads. They failed to complete the motorway that connects our two biggest economic drivers—Edinburgh and Glasgow. They presided over the sustained decline of public transport with their policy on buses. Perhaps the biggest mistake that they made on transport was the ideologically driven, last-minute privatisation of the railway industry, which resulted in higher costs for the taxpayer, a reduced emphasis on safety and increased unreliability. We are still trying to correct that situation. The only people who benefited from the Tory privatisation of the railways were the lucky handful of individuals who happened to be the managers of the rolling-stock companies, who became millionaires overnight at the expense of the British public.

As I have examined the Tories' record, I will examine Labour's record in Government since 1997 and 1999. On the economy, that record has resulted in Britain having the lowest unemployment, inflation and interest rates that we have had for generations. If it has been so easy for us to achieve that record, why did the Tories never achieve it during their years in power?

Mary Scanlon: Does Bristow Muldoon agree with me—it would be difficult not to, as I lectured economics for 20 years—that the period between 1992 and 1997 was the first time since statistics began to be collected that unemployment and inflation both fell, disproving the Phillips curve?

Bristow Muldoon: I am astounded that Mary Scanlon is in the Conservative party if she lectured in economics. She obviously did not understand the subject well, and I fear for her students. The Tories' record of failure on the economy is the worst of any British Government since the second world war. If they cannot recognise that, they will never start to make any recovery in the country.

As I said, the achievements of the Labour Government under the stewardship of Gordon Brown are the lowest unemployment, inflation and interest rates for decades. They all aid and create the conditions that are necessary for economic growth.

However, that is not enough. We must invest in skills—I am sure that other colleagues will touch on that issue—and in our transport system. We have already started a major shift towards that, by investing in public transport and trying to create a move towards a better modal share of public transport within our transport system. We have created the public transport fund and the integrated transport fund, which have put money

into bus and rail services in Scotland. Capacity on train routes in Fife and West Lothian is due to increase this year due to investment that the Executive and the Strategic Rail Authority are making. More rolling stock will arrive later this year, following a deal between the Scottish Executive, ScotRail and the SRA. In addition, new or reopened lines, such as the proposed new lines to our airports and the Bathgate to Airdie line, will start to come on stream. We are also increasing resources for local government to allow councils to invest in the condition of our roads and reverse the neglect that the Tories left us to inherit. We have established an investment programme that will complete some of the missing links in Scotland's motorway sections, including the M8.

We cannot put right the neglect of our transport system in four years; it will take years of sustained investment to put that right. The Tories try to deny their past and their record of failure in Scotland. I suggest to them that all the opinion polls indicate that the Scottish people have not forgotten the Tories' past. The Scottish people rejected them throughout their years in power under Margaret Thatcher and John Major and will again reject them utterly in the elections on 1 May.

10:55

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Bristow Muldoon mentioned that the Tories were in power for 18 years and he put the case for change. The Labour party has been in power in local government in the west of the central belt for 50 years. The argument that it is time for change can be advanced against more parties than just the Conservative party.

Bristow Muldoon: Does Lord James Douglas-Hamilton accept that, in a democracy, the people decide whether it is time for a change? The people decided that it was time for a change from the Tories. There is no sign of that with Labour in central Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As Bristow Muldoon and I are good democrats, we both accept that. However, my point is that the argument that it is time for change can be advanced in a range of circumstances.

It is no secret that we want a much tougher approach to law and order than that presented by the Executive. The Executive boasts that it has provided the highest level of policing in Scotland. However, it chooses not to shout from the rooftops that, in the past four years, drug crime has gone up by 9 per cent, fire raising and vandalism have gone up by 19 per cent and gun crime, excluding air weapons, has gone up by 23 per cent. At the same time, our police services are tied up with a great many additional responsibilities and

criminals are escaping prison thanks to an Executive that is desperate to pursue policies of early release and alternatives to custody to alleviate overcrowding in prisons. We believe that the Executive's policies have failed to protect the public.

Iain Smith rose—

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I would like to develop my argument, if I may.

We want to encourage a zero-tolerance policy in policing in Scotland. To do that, we will provide £45 million to provide better protection for our neighbourhoods, £25 million of which will be additional spending for the police. Our policy will require all police boards, through their chief constables and in consultation with councils in their area, to prepare a neighbourhood protection plan to deliver a zero-tolerance approach in community policing. Further, we would introduce a system whereby local police statistics would be published to improve public accountability.

Brian Fitzpatrick: Does Lord James Douglas-Hamilton accept that a substantial contribution to such a policy could be made under the existing community safety plans, such as that in East Dunbartonshire? Will he join me in welcoming the work of the police force in East Dunbartonshire and, in particular, the introduction of the cadet scheme? That welcome initiative to get young people into the police force has been introduced and delivered under Labour. I believe that his party might have at least attempted to welcome that initiative.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Such initiatives should always be encouraged. However, it is important to have far more police officers visible in communities. That will be our absolute resolve and top priority.

It has often been pointed out that it is no use having police officers if the criminals escape justice due to backlogs in the courts. It is just as important to have more procurators fiscal. The Chhokar inquiry recommended that we have more fiscals. Ministers, including the First Minister, do not deny that there is a pressing need for more fiscals.

We also want to increase sheriffs' sentencing powers on summary matters. We believe that that would be a sensible move but, unfortunately, it was rejected during consideration of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill. We consider the protection of the public to be paramount. That is why we believe that there should be more honesty in sentencing and that early release should not be an automatic right but should be earned. We will try to reduce the levels of automatic early release.

Mr Rumbles: Is Lord James Douglas-Hamilton saying that the Tory solution to the criminal justice

system's problems is not only to have more people in prison but to have more people in prison for longer?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am saying that the community should be protected from those who represent a violent danger to it. The Justice 1 Committee is about to produce a report on the sentencing of those who are in prison for minor offences, such as fine default.

Drugs threaten the fabric of society. Serial criminals are able to use the fact that they have a drug habit to escape prison through drugs courts and drug treatment and testing orders. We believe that such opportunities should be given to first-time or second-time offenders, but not to serial offenders, who should go to prison. We believe that there must be a strict, zero-tolerance approach to drugs in prisons.

We would like weekend and evening detention, tagging, community service orders, supervised attendance orders and DTTOs to be used, as well as a substantial increase made in secure accommodation for the children's hearings system.

I recommend those policies as being in tune with the electorate.

11:00

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): We should note a moment of history today, as the Conservatives lead what is possibly their last ever debate in the Scottish Parliament in its modern history. As Donald Dewar once famously said, the Scottish Conservatives are like the North American buffalo: once seen in great herds, but now only dotting around the place in ones and twos.

What of the Executive? We have had four years of complacency, back-stabbing and internal feuds. The result is a record that speaks for itself: a country with vast potential, yet with a mediocre performance. This country—our country—is led by a man who rules the roost by backbiting and briefing against his own senior colleagues. The fox is very much in charge of the hen-coop.

This is the Executive's record: waiting lists are up; crime is rising; one in three children live in poverty; and public services are in crisis. Perhaps most unforgivable of all, there is a paucity of ambition at the very heart of our country's Government. All the while, the country wants reform and needs growth.

When one of Scotland's leading academics, Professor Tom Devine, joins a growing consensus for reform and economic independence, Government ministers step up to the plate and condemn and dismiss one of Scotland's finest

brains. They say—wait for it—that we cannot take control of our own economy and our own finances because the Government spends more money than it raises in tax. That provides the imperative for reform, not a reason not to reform.

The absurdly backward-looking Labour Executive needs to examine its conscience. The politics of the 1970s are over; we need to step forward into the 21st century. Given all that, is it any wonder that the SNP is, through the acclamation of the Labour party, winning the argument? It has clearer, stronger and more consistent policies and communication on the economy. Given that praise from our opponents, today is a heady day indeed. We recognise that we still have work to do and trust to build in the country, but we will go on trying to build a coalition of interest in Scotland growing up and moving on. We will put our case openly and positively, and we await the verdict of the people.

Murdo Fraser: I sometimes think that Mr Wilson is a singular voice of sanity in the Scottish National Party, as he supports financial autonomy because he wants to use it to stimulate economic growth in order to reduce taxes. All his colleagues, however, support financial autonomy for exactly the opposite reason: they wish to raise taxes in order to fund their grandiose spending plans. What is the real policy of the SNP?

Andrew Wilson: We often like to receive praise from our opponents, but that is one piece of praise that I would rather have missed. I shall have to go home and spend a lot of time in the bath tonight, examining my conscience—[*Laughter.*]—as well as the *Official Report* of my speech.

The truth is that financial independence brings with it the opportunity to deliver a vibrant economy, which, with the proper mix of taxation, will give us growth. That is the way to fund better public services. From left and right—across the political spectrum—everyone can back the case for Scotland moving on.

The current approach simply is not working. Let us examine the record: in the last period, growth has been 13 times faster in the United Kingdom as a whole than it has been in Scotland; one in four households in Strathclyde have no adult in work; the sectors currently in recession include energy, water engineering, textiles and chemicals; and the sectors with falling output include financial services, metals, food and drink and others. The economy is in deep trouble and, since Labour took power at Holyrood four years ago, there has been 0.7 per cent annual growth, which is one third of the already abysmal trend rate.

What can we expect from the Labour Executive in the weeks ahead as we examine the record of the past? It is led by a man who is trying to unify

the nation, yet his record on taking office was sacking Jackie Baillie, Sarah Boyack, Angus MacKay, Tom McCabe, Rhona Brankin and Alasdair Morrison. Susan Deacon was constructively dismissed and Wendy Alexander resigned months later, saying:

“I can’t get growth on the agenda”,

adding that the

“First Minister does not consider economic growth to be one of his top priorities”.

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): Will Andrew Wilson take an intervention?

Andrew Wilson: It is the last minute of my speech; Wendy Alexander should take a seat—we have heard enough of her interruptions this week.

More recently, Richard Simpson resigned, and Patricia Ferguson and Andy Kerr were knifed in the back for attacking the Liberals. Andy Kerr will be sacked after the election, and Mike Watson is about to be sacked for attacking the Government over the Victoria infirmary. We are told that Cathy Jamieson, who has been briefed against, is to be sacked in the same week that we learn that Tom McCabe and Angus MacKay are being brought back. This week—unforgivably, in what is a time of crisis—Iain Gray has been stabbed in the back by Andy Kerr, with support from the football chairman, Jack McConnell.

Ms Alexander: Will the member take an intervention?

Andrew Wilson: I am in my last second; Wendy Alexander should examine the Parliament’s procedures.

Who is left standing in the total mess that is the present Labour leadership? Nobody seems to be left standing, other than Jack McConnell, who is trying to brief against his colleagues. That is not leadership and it is not what Scotland needs. We need to move on—we cannot afford to wait any longer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): As of now, speeches are to be kept to four minutes, plus time for interventions.

11:06

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): This kind of Opposition debate sometimes calls for a secular Lenten exercise. No party, no matter its history and its achievements, enjoys a divine right to govern. Every party that seriously aspires to Government must strive continually to make itself relevant to the era in which it seeks to serve.

We might have hoped, in an Opposition debate, to find some evidence of an Opposition aspiring to

Government. In the 1950s, the Tories commanded 50 per cent of the vote, not in rural Dorset, but here in Scotland. In 2001, against the backdrop of 1997, they gained just one seat in the United Kingdom, their hold over AB voters shrunk further and the average age of their voters rose yet again. Among the under-40s, the Liberals—I repeat: the Liberals—are now pushing them out of the way. Across the United Kingdom, the Tories have about 30 per cent of public support and have been languishing at that level for a decade. That is their lowest sustained run in modern history. In Scotland, they are bumping along with between 10 per cent and 15 per cent support because they have no wish to govern nor, on today’s evidence, to be relevant. There was not a hint of reflection or change in David McLetchie’s speech. Perhaps it is a collective death wish.

As ever, we heard a predictable opening speech from the nationalists—there was nothing wrong with its being predictable. The poor old Liberal Democrats, yet again, were treated to some kind of rough wooing by Roseanna Cunningham, as she opened coalition talks in order to establish the first nationalist Administration.

With some odd exceptions, we know that Mr McLetchie is usually careful with his language. We know what the Conservatives say about decentralisation, and we know what that is about: it is about reducing the scope and power of the state and its agencies—apart, of course, from when that goes against their vested interests and those of their voters.

We have been asked to place our trust in the people: I doubt that anyone in the Parliament—perhaps with the exception of the troika—would have any difficulty with that. We would also agree with having high-quality public services. The Conservatives’ commitment to match our spending on health over the next three years is very welcome, and is a commonsense thing—they will perhaps be interested to hear about that in Smith Square. The Tories have talked about increasing expenditure on infrastructure in public services. Again, we will be interested to see that—if they stick to it. If we can get consensus that it is not possible to build a world-class national health service without paying for it, that is all the better. We should welcome that. I do not think that the Conservatives mean that but, if they are saying it, that is at least an improvement.

We heard a retuning of “no such thing as society”. I take it that that means going back to tax cuts for the rich and poorer services for the poor. Society is suffering as a result. We do not need to look beyond this chamber, but we should. The people outside the chamber know that we have all paid the price of the Conservatives’ approach to society. More important for Mr McLetchie, they know that Scotland must not pay that price again.

Mary Scanlon: Does the member disagree with Audit Scotland, which recently reported that 50 per cent of wards in Scottish hospitals are understaffed by nurses and others?

Brian Fitzpatrick: That is why I want to ensure that we get the required reform and investment. I want there to be scrutiny of public spending—I agree with Mr McLetchie on that—although I do not view that as some totem in itself.

We heard a serious point about the improving regulation in Scotland unit. I would argue that we need more specialists in the civil service, rather than fewer. We were told that we need not an Iain Deficit Syndrome, a wee Goldie or even a Murdobarger, but a CURTIS—presumably a Tony CURTIS. If we can get the Tony part of that agreed, I will be quite content.

As Andrew Wilson mentioned, we are heading for the end of Tory debates in the chamber, and who knows, perhaps the end of the Tories. In the past four years, there has not been one shadow budget or legislative programme. If the Tories devised those on their own time and money, I probably would not object. However, Audit Scotland also has a role. The assisted places party is paid out of public funds for its research and opposition activity—McShort money, if you like. As this is likely to be the last Tory debate and there has been no shadow budget and no shadow legislative programme, what have the Tories been doing with all that public money?

11:11

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): It must have been extremely difficult to choose only half a dozen of the Executive's success stories for the amendment. I should like to go through that half dozen.

First, the amendment mentions the record investment in our national health service, which is clear. The second issue mentioned is the abolition of tuition fees. For the benefit of Roseanna Cunningham and the "rough wooing" that we received from her, I make it clear that there is no question that—

Murdo Fraser: Will the member give way?

Mr Rumbles: Just a moment. The abolition of tuition fees was achieved in coalition. That abolition means that if top-up fees ever were introduced in Scotland—as the Tories and the Labour Party wanted to do south of the border—the Scottish Executive would have to pay the top-up fee because it pays the fees. That is why no top-up fees will be introduced in Scotland.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): What is Mike Rumbles's response to Tony Blair's claim that the fees have not been lost, but are postponed?

Mr Rumbles: He would say that, would he not? He is a member of the Labour Party. I am speaking on behalf of the Liberal Democrats.

We have free personal care for older people, which is a huge achievement. That indicates the effect of the Liberal Democrat influence in the Scottish Executive: free personal care has not been introduced south of the border, where the Labour Party rules on its own. In Scotland, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party rule in coalition.

We also have free nursery places for three and four-year olds whose parents want such places, as well as a record number of police officers, and so on.

The creation of the Cairngorms national park in the north-east hits home with me, particularly where direct elections to the board are concerned. That radical achievement, which we managed in the chamber, empowers local people and was a huge step forward.

The First Minister recently announced transport commitments for the western peripheral route, and that is a terrific step forward. It would be a terrific achievement to have that western bypass round Aberdeen within the next eight years. We have never had such commitments from the many years of Tory rule, or of lone Labour rule from Westminster.

Despite the Arbutnott formula, we have had the highest-ever level of funding for Grampian NHS Board. [*Interruption.*] I am getting a barracking from the Conservatives. I expect that, because I barrack them.

The Conservatives seem to live in a different world. References were made earlier to Liam Fox, the Conservative spokesman on the NHS south of the border, and his taped conversation at the Tory party conference in which he revealed his four-phase programme. In the first phase of that programme the public are to be persuaded that the NHS is not working.

Do members remember Iain Duncan Smith? He said in 2001 that health care in the private sector would cost more, so that patients would have to top up with their own money or use an insurance scheme. That would mean top-up fees for the national health service.

As I am talking about the Tory view of top-up fees, I would like to bring Brian Monteith into the debate. He said:

"If St Andrews and other Scottish universities are to remain in the premier league...to fund this may require the best universities to charge top-up fees...as is the case in Harvard and Yale."

He was put down by the shadow education spokesman, Damian Green, who said:

"This is social engineering of the worst possible kind."

Mr Monteith: Obviously the member would like to take an intervention on that.

Mr Rumbles: I would be delighted to take an intervention, if I am given time.

Mr Monteith: Having compared two quotations from different sources Mr Rumbles may also care to note that I went on to say that universities can make their own, independent judgment and could introduce top-up fees only if they gave up public funding. No university has indicated that it wants to give up public funding, so there is no chance of top-up fees being introduced. I would not support the introduction of top-up fees if universities continued to receive public funds.

Mr Rumbles: The member has missed the point. Top-up fees would be paid in full by the Scottish Executive, out of public money. The Conservatives have completely lost the plot.

I could continue talking about the years of Tory failure, but the Presiding Officer is telling me to press on.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am telling the member to wind up.

Mr Rumbles: A great deal has been done, but much work remains. In the next session, I would like to support an Executive that is focused on the reform of our whole local government system, including local finance. Proportional representation is the way in which to achieve that. The introduction of PR for local government is a fundamental issue for any possible future coalition.

11:16

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I am pleased that Mr Euan Robson will wind up in this debate, as he has practical experience. He lives in a ward in Kelso that the Conservatives have won from the Liberal Democrats. Over the past couple of years the Conservatives have been making gains at local government level from Labour, the SNP and Liberals in real elections, using real ballot boxes. When it comes to real votes, the Conservatives are still in there for the fight. Do not write us off.

The second point with which Mr Robson will be able to deal in his summing up is Mr Lyon's interesting take on the past six years—especially the first two years of the Labour Government. On this occasion, I agree whole-heartedly with Mr Lyon. Labour's record on transport between 1997 and 1999 is a disgrace. Labour stopped the completion of the M8, which was about to go ahead—

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): When?

David Mundell: If Karen Whitefield took notice of these things, she would know that the order had been laid.

The extension of the M74 to the stretch between Gretna and Carlisle—a road link vital to Scotland's economy—was stopped and the M77 extension was delayed needlessly. Instead there was a road-building hiatus, anti-motorist rhetoric, political correctness and a relentless move towards tolls.

At least Wendy Alexander was honest. She admitted that transport was sold short in the first spending review. Labour's transport guru, David Begg, estimates that at least £90 million less has been spent on transport in Scotland than has been spent equivalently in England and Wales.

George Lyon: David Mundell should remember that the authors of the budget for the first two years of the Labour Government were the Tory party.

David Mundell: I recall that when the Conservatives left office spending was at record levels. If we are returned to office in Scotland with our commitment to spending £100 million extra on roads, it will return to those levels.

Iain Smith: Will the member give way?

David Mundell: I cannot, because the Liberal Democrats just make things up.

Let us deal with some facts. If the Conservatives are returned to office in Scotland, Scotland's missing motorway links will be completed. The A8000 will be upgraded. We will see the Aberdeen bypass, rather than just the smoke and mirrors of the Executive.

Yesterday Iain Gray, the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, said smugly that the Edinburgh crossrail project had been implemented by the laying of new rail track. However, in the written answer that I received subsequently from Lewis Macdonald, it was conceded that existing freight lines had been used. In the past four years—never mind the previous two—not a single mile of road or rail track has been laid. That is the reality of the Executive's transport policies.

We make no apology for suggesting taking money from the budget of Scottish Enterprise to put directly into the infrastructure that will make a real difference to business, not consultants. We want tarmac and rail. The people of Scotland will see that on 1 May.

11:20

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): The tenor of the debate has been, "Whose Government is worse than ours?", as the Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive trades punches

with the Tories. The Tories are trying to conjure up imagery of 18 glorious years. Mr McLetchie waxed eloquently about crime and law and order. That was from a party that cherishes the United Kingdom, but presided over the worst urban riots seen south of the border in centuries. The streets of Toxteth, Handsworth and Tottenham testified to that in the 1980s. The Tories set the United Kingdom on a path following the right-wing agenda of the USA under "Reaganomics" and the trickle-down economy. All that failed, bringing social discord and tension.

I expect no better from the Conservatives, but the people of Scotland were entitled to expect better from new Labour. Mr McLetchie attacks what he describes as a centre-left establishment—we should be so lucky. I see that as an opportunity. One of the strengths of this party should be to create a centre-left agenda to allow our people to prosper. I do not want to see our country continue down the path that we are currently following: that of the USA-UK-Australia model, with all the problems of social inequality that that brings, creating "haves" and "have nots", alienating huge swathes of our society and resulting in crime, ill health, delinquency and alcohol and drug abuse.

We have the opportunity to follow a different agenda, based on economic growth, but recognising the responsibility that a state has. There must be a welfare state and it is the duty of a state to look after people irrespective of their income, wealth and power. We should not dismantle the welfare state, as was done in the 1980s and 1990s, and which continues to be done in the 21st century under new Labour.

Ms Alexander: Will the member give way?

Mr MacAskill: Ms Alexander will get her opportunity later.

The Scotland that we seek is not based on Bush or Clinton's United States of America; it is based on Persson and Palme's Sweden. We would much prefer to follow that direction. But what of the Lib-Lab position? They say, "Not our fault, gov; it's all the fault of the Tories' mess." One Scottish Parliament, two UK Governments, three First Ministers later, they say that it is nothing to do with them; it is all the fault of 18 years of Tory rule. There comes a time when the buck stops with those in the Administration.

That was highlighted yesterday in the ministerial statement on transport. An Executive is judged not on the brochures and the studies that it publishes, or its manifesto commitments for a future period of office, but on what it achieved during its tenure. Three transport ministers later, three years and 10 months into office, three weeks from dissolution, the Executive was asked—as Mr Mundell

mentioned—"How many miles of road have you built and how many miles of track have you laid?" We received no answer yesterday or today. The proof of the pudding is in the eating and the Executive has failed in terms of the tangibles. The Executive had a fair wind as the first Scottish Executive in 300 years. It had the empathy, sympathy and support of the people of Scotland, but all it offers is excuses.

The time has come to stop looking back and apportioning blame to what happened in the 1980s and 1990s and to start looking forward to what the solutions are, so that we can compete and prosper in the 21st century. I believe that that means allowing our country to prosper and to go forward, to release our potential, to stop looking at the problems that we have and to start looking at what we can achieve. That means giving the Parliament the proper powers of an independent nation and that means that we must go forward recognising the necessity of economic growth balanced with a stable society in which a state has a role, duty and obligations. That means having a change in the elections on 1 May to a nationalist Administration.

11:24

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):

When I first learned of the subject of today's Tory debate, I thought that the Tories were attempting to run some sort of parliamentary version of "Desert Island Discs". That made me wonder which records could summarise the Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive's record of achievement. I thought of "2-4-6-8 Motorway", for the completion of the upgrade of the A8 to motorway status. I thought of "Day Tripper" for free off-peak travel for the elderly. "The Last Train to Clarksville" would obviously become "The First Train to Airdrie from Bathgate".

I then pondered the songs that the Tories might have used for their years in office. "Money's Too Tight (To Mention)" would most certainly have been the song for local government. Then there is "Help"—too many people to mention. The anthem of unemployment could have been "Another One Bites the Dust" or "Maggie's Farm". While we are on the subject of Maggie, I do not want her friends on the nationalist benches to feel left out, but the only record that I could think of for them was, "Somewhere over the Rainbow".

The record of the Scottish Executive stands in stark contrast to the 18 years for which the Tories abused power. Finally, after 18 years of the Tories we have a commitment to upgrade the A8 to motorway status and to reopen the Airdrie-Bathgate rail line. There is now a guaranteed nursery place for every three and four-year-old, compared with the Tories' failed voucher scheme. We have a pay and conditions deal that

recognises and values the efforts of teachers, compared to 18 years of Tory neglect and indifference. We have an unprecedented programme of building for new schools, compared with the decay and decline caused by 18 years of Tory underachievement.

Mr Monteith: I am delighted and thankful that Karen Whitefield has given way—she is “My First, My Last, My Everything” after all. Does the member accept that the Tory song would be “Simply the Best”?

Karen Whitefield: I say to Mr Monteith that the children of Airdrie who go to school in damp, appalling buildings would not say that the Tories were simply the best, but simply the worst.

A stable economy is important and that is what a Labour Government at Westminster has delivered. We have the lowest inflation for a generation, compared to 15 per cent interest rates when the Tories were in power.

Back where I come from in Lanarkshire, people would say that our record is a “shootie-in”, but I think that we have much more to add. Unemployment is down to its lowest level in 25 years, compared with the giddy and quite sickening heights of 3 million, which the Tories said was a price worth paying. We have free local bus travel for the elderly, compared to absolutely nothing, because the Tories would not have had that vision or the commitment to public service.

That was then and this is now. Perhaps the Scottish Tories have learned from their mistakes. They are more community-oriented, are they not? They are much more compassionate Conservatives than they were, surely. They would never revert to their true-blue type. Then again, yesterday they voted against the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Bill, which is considered to be one of the most progressive, right-making pieces of legislation in Scotland.

The achievements of the Scottish Executive over the past four years dwarf those of the Tory party, which was in power for 18 years. Let us not forget that if the Tories had had their way there would be no Scottish Parliament, no free bus travel for the elderly, no powers to seize the assets of drug dealers and HCI would not have been taken back into public service. Thankfully, the nightmare of those 18 years is over and I think that the electorate will reinforce that message on 1 May.

11:28

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I must say that I am finding this one of the more entertaining debates of late and it does not lack cut and thrust for that. I am only disappointed that George Lyon is not here to continue to take in some messages. I hear that he is quite good at

karaoke and I think that the most appropriate song for him today would be “Road to Nowhere”, as it is by the Talking Heads. He could also sing, “Hit the Road, Jack”, or perhaps that could be, “Build a Road, Jack.” Ultimately, his main song would be “Road to Hell” by Chris Rea, because that is the road that the Liberals are going down, being in tow with the Labour party.

It was said earlier that the Tories should apologise. Of course we should. We should apologise for the reaction to our successful policies, which brought forward new Labour politicians such as Karen Whitefield, Bristow Muldoon and Brian Fitzpatrick. We apologise for being the inspiration for those politicians.

I must use my time to talk about the subject for debate.

I will move on to consider some aspects of education, in particular the indiscipline in our schools. The dreadful record of indiscipline in our schools is the result of the Labour and Liberal Democrat inclusion targets. The fact that violent and disruptive pupils are remaining in the classroom is ensuring an increase in violent assaults on all school staff—teachers, janitors and dinner ladies are all suffering assaults. In the two hours since the debate began, there will have been another eight assaults. On average, there is an assault every 15 minutes. That situation is a shocking scandal for which the Executive must be held to account.

We can improve attainment only if we have peace and discipline in our classrooms. We must protect the teachers and those children—the vast majority—who want to learn. It is no surprise, when we look at the attainment targets that the Executive has set, that we find that it is failing. Eighty per cent of pupils were meant to achieve the attainment target of level D by primary 7, but only 72 per cent are reaching that target. The situation is worse by the time they have got to secondary 2, when 50 per cent of pupils have not reached the target that they should have reached. More than 30 per cent of pupils are two years behind the target. They have very little chance, if any, of catching up. Attainment is letting down the pupils in Scotland.

We were told that McCrone would solve many of the problems. However, we find that the number of teachers who are leaving the classroom and taking time off because of stress—which, of course, is related to indiscipline in the classroom—is rising. Although teachers might be better paid and might have better conditions, which all members of the Parliament supported, they are still taking time off because they are facing indiscipline in the classroom. The Conservative party would change that.

Bill Butler: In Brian Monteith's world of education, everything is for the worst in the worst of all possible worlds. We all accept that there are problems. Would not the member accept that, through their hard work, teachers have enabled larger numbers of pupils and students to obtain standard grades, highers and advanced highers than ever before. Should not we celebrate that?

Mr Monteith: It is a delight to celebrate that, because it is all part of the five-to-14 standard-grade achievement that the Tories introduced, which was about identifying the problems that existed in schools and producing remedies. However, last year we discovered that the number of pupils who leave school without qualifications after 12 years of state education had increased by 8 per cent. That is a figure that all members of the Government should be thoroughly ashamed of.

We have seen that the Executive's education policies have failed the vulnerable. It is the clever, bright children who are managing to get through the comprehensive system. The Executive's policies on special educational needs and on vulnerable children in the bottom schools, which are finding it harder to continue to improve their attainment, are failing and it is on those policies that the Executive will be condemned. Motion S1M-3986 might be the last Opposition motion that the Conservatives lodge, because when the public wake up to the Executive's record on education, they will ensure that our next motion will be an Administration motion.

11:34

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Rather than dealing in rhetoric, I want to do a reality check and to mark a report card on the Lib-Lab coalition, which will apply to their achievements in that Liberal fiefdom, the Scottish Borders.

In the Scottish Borders, 1999 began well, with the loss of 1,200 jobs and the closure of Viasystems. The jobs were transferred to north Tyneside. The plant has now closed and the £12 million that the Department of Trade and Industry gave to Viasystems will never be recovered. The first instalment payment is due in 2007, but few believe that the money will ever be seen.

In the same year, there was a fig-leaf announcement about a call centre in the Scottish Borders. After first being announced by the late Donald Dewar, it was reannounced by Wendy Alexander and subsequent enterprise ministers. It was claimed that it would create 250 jobs in the Scottish Borders, but it has not done that. To date, only 100 jobs have been created there.

The lethal decommissioning proposals for the fishing fleet and the possibility of displacement to

prawn fishing represent a huge threat to about 300 jobs in Eyemouth.

Over the past seven years, the net loss of jobs in the Scottish Borders has been 500. That does not take into account the transfer of jobs from manufacturing to service industries, which reduces the income. The average weekly wage in a Scottish Borders household is £50 per week less than it is in the rest of Scotland, and the population is aging—in the next 10 years, 50 per cent of those in work will retire.

Transport is at the core of economic development. There has been practically no investment in roads in the Scottish Borders—the A68, the A7 and the A702 have been untouched. Only the A1 is having part of the road dualled, but that is because the relevant part is in a Labour constituency and Labour looks after its own. In 2002, the A6 closed for four days, because of a snowfall. In 2003, the A72—the main road from Gala and Peebles to Glasgow—has closed for two weeks, because of a landslip. The A6 and the A72 are main Borders roads.

Trains do not stop in the Borders. There is an overwhelming case for the Waverley line, as an economic necessity, as an investment in the community and as a development that would help social inclusion. The minister has put only £2 million into the Borders railway line, to promote the private bill. There is no commitment to funding the railway line. The private bill will be introduced during March, just in time for dissolution, and there will be no need to attach a financial memorandum to it. It is interesting that it is proposed that there will be four stops in Midlothian and just one in the Borders. Midlothian is a Labour seat.

There are always the buses. The Tories promoted good old deregulation and the Liberals and Labour have endorsed it. With courtesy breakdowns, it can take two hours to travel from Peebles to Edinburgh on buses that are often between 15 and 20 years old—so much for public transport. Rather than being driven to use public transport, the Borders public are being driven to get back into their cars to pay the imminent congestion charges in Edinburgh.

Free travel for the elderly is not much use if there is no bus service. In Gala, the number 6 is being taken off. As its route goes up a steep incline, it is usually full of elderly people. From March 31, there will be no bus service. At Ladywood in Penicuik, where there is a big elderly population, there is no bus service in the evening or on a Sunday. Elderly people have bus passes, but there ain't no buses. That saves everyone money.

Free personal care for the elderly is being rationed. There are huge delays in the central

heating programme and a faulty service. On nursing care, people are losing nursing home places because they are not being funded. Local authorities give their homes £70 per week more for residential care than they pay to private nursing homes. Thirty thousand Scottish pensioners are in poverty.

The Executive has failed the Borders and it has failed the elderly, so I mark “failed” on its report card.

11:38

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde)

(Lab): The motion seeks to bury the past. It ignores the impact that the Conservatives’ policies had on our communities, it turns a blind eye to the destructive days of the last Tory Government and it refuses to accept the long-term damage that the Conservatives and their policies inflicted on Scotland.

The Conservative party is the party that took shipbuilding out of Greenock. It closed the Glen yard, Lithgow’s yard, Cowal Engineering and the Inchgreen dry dock. The Conservatives might not like listening to the list of closures, but it was harder to live through them. The Tories also closed the Carlsdyke yard, Scott’s Shipbuilding, Scott’s engine works and Kincaid’s engine works. In spite of that, we hear Tory spokesmen bemoaning the decline of the manufacturing industry.

The Tory party was the party that took “working” out of “working class” and gave my constituency 23 per cent unemployment. Although unemployment there is still high—it is about 6 per cent or 7 per cent—it is much better than it was. The Tories replaced skilled, stable jobs with low-paid, low-skill contract work, crushed—in the name of right-wing ideology—my community’s confidence and had the cheek to tell us that that was a price worth paying. We will never forget and we will never forgive. Brian Monteith is smiling again. He thinks it is funny.

Members should not just take my point of view, as I have a right to be bitter on behalf of my community. They should take someone else’s view.

Mr Monteith: Will the member give way?

Mr McNeil: No. Brian Monteith has already taken up a lot of time of people who do not even want to be here.

“Businesses went to the wall, we broke our pledge on taxes, there was negative equity in homes, the public felt hurt.

Then we lectured them, and we seemed arrogant. We said it was all your fault, not our fault—you are the problem, not us ... They still remember that we were in power, and that is what we left them with.”

That is a pretty accurate rundown by none other than Mr Iain Duncan Smith in *The Sunday Telegraph* of 6 October 2002. All the accusations and all the bluster cannot hide the legacy that the Conservatives left. From what we have heard this morning, it seems that nothing would change: cuts of £250 million in the enterprise budget and 20 per cent cuts in public spending. For cuts in red tape, read a retreat on rights for part-time workers, and a retreat on employment-time regulations and rights to holidays. Those rights were all introduced by Labour and are in danger from the Conservatives. They clearly have nothing new to say.

This morning, we see the enemies of devolution on both sides of the chamber come together again. What pains them most is that this Labour-led Executive is making devolution work successfully and picking up the pieces of the Tory wasted years. Labour looked on as John Major and William Hague marched the Tory party to the cliff edge. On today’s performance, under Iain Duncan Smith or David McLetchie—members may take their pick—they are about to take a great leap forward. We should wish them well, and vote against the amendment.

11:42

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to hear Duncan McNeil suggesting that members should vote for the motion—which is obviously what he means if they are to vote against the amendment. That is an endorsement of what we are trying to put forward.

I declare an interest as an ex-farmer and current landowner in south Ayrshire.

The purpose of the debate is to determine whether this first Scottish Government has delivered for Scotland. It will probably surprise nobody who knows me that I wish to speak from a rural perspective. As I have said many times before in the chamber, much of rural Scotland—certainly the South of Scotland, which I represent—was pretty sceptical about the very concept of the Parliament. Indeed, Dumfries and Galloway, the region within which I live, was the only region on mainland Scotland that voted against the Parliament having any tax-raising or tax-altering powers. Nonetheless, that scepticism was dumbed down and, to some extent, bought off by the impossible aspirations and unachievable visions that were advanced by all and sundry prior to the elections of 1999.

Following those elections, considerable support was expressed for the creation of the embryonic department of rural affairs, rather than the old agriculture, forestry and fisheries department that existed before. Even when that metamorphosed

into rural development, and finally emerged as the environment and rural affairs department, the concept seemed sound enough, so why now, nearly four years on, is there disappointment at the Government's mishandling of rural Scotland, which is so tangible that it is hard to encounter anything other than distrust, dislike and often sheer cynicism towards most of the Administration's output? The answer can best be summed up by highlighting the missed opportunities and mixed messages that have become the hallmark of Ross Finnie's ministry.

It was glaringly obvious to most people involved in driving the rural economy that, following devolution, most of the important decisions governing rural policy would continue to be made either in Brussels or at Westminster. Therefore, the opportunity for a Scottish minister to alter radically the broad drift of policy was always going to be minimal at best. However, there existed a golden opportunity for Ross Finnie, or any other minister, to concentrate their energy on supporting and encouraging initiatives and policies downstream from primary production, to ensure that the high-quality products of all types for which rural Scotland is so well known did not leave rural Scotland until the last drop of added value had been extracted from them, thus genuinely encouraging rural development. That focus and that drive would have helped to bring about the economic regeneration that rural Scotland needed so badly four years ago, and which it is still in desperate need of today.

Instead of any such focus, we have had nothing but mixed messages, as the Minister for Environment and Rural Development chose instead to concentrate his fire on obtaining the easy headlines that come with the politically correct policies to which David McLetchie referred.

Brian Fitzpatrick: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Minister for Parliamentary Business (Euan Robson): Will the member give way?

Alex Fergusson: I have four years of disaster to get into one more minute, so I am afraid that I cannot give way.

The primary example of Ross Finnie getting his ministerial wires crossed is the access provisions in the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, which I have always said would bring about confrontation when it did not have to. If members still do not believe me, they should study the recent verbal outpourings of the Ramblers Association. Basically, access is now available to all people on all land, yet only weeks after Parliament approved the bill, the minister issued his biosecurity code of practice to all farmers, one of the principal recommendations of which is to keep people away from livestock as much as possible.

The Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Bill, which is to be concluded next week, aims to reinvigorate the tenanted sector, which is something with which the Conservative party whole-heartedly agrees, yet the confusion and uncertainty that have been created over the right to buy, which the minister himself deplored only two years ago, will kill the sector stone dead.

Jim Wallace berated me in the chamber for daring to question the Executive's commitment to rolling out broadband technology across rural Scotland. "Look at our pathfinder project," he roared in indignation. Well, I have been looking for its benefits ever since, and I cannot find them. What I have found is that information technology-based firms, which should be contributing so much to rural development, are having to move out of rural Scotland and back to the central belt to be able to compete on a level playing field.

The examples go on and on, but I am running out of time. I finish by saying that this first Scottish Government will be remembered as one that promised too much and delivered too little. To deflect attention from its deficiencies, it has concentrated its fire on the soft targets of land reform and politically correct niceties, rather than the hard issues of the day, which so badly need the Parliament's attention. Rural Scotland is in disarray because of this Administration, and in seven weeks' time it will exact its revenge.

11:46

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): We recently had the BAFTAs, the Brits and the Pride of Britain awards, but looking at the Tory motion and listening to the Conservatives speak today, one cannot help but think that they deserve a special brass neck of Britain award. If we were at the Oscars, the Tories' performance today would not even get a nomination, although the SNP would certainly pick up the award for the best adapted work of fiction for its constantly changing economic policies.

I want to address unemployment and red tape. There is still work to be done in creating sustainable, quality jobs. Job losses, in particular in the manufacturing sector, are certainly setbacks, but I will not sit here taking lectures from the Tories, because I would like to consider some facts. An examination of unemployment figures is interesting. My own constituency of Midlothian is an area that the Tories left reeling from the massive blow of pit closures, just as Greenock lost thousands of jobs with the closure of the shipyards and Lanarkshire was decimated by the destruction of the steel industry, although thankfully, those areas are turning the corner. In April 1997—the dying days of the last Tory Government—there were 1,354 unemployed people in Midlothian

constituency. By the time the Scottish Parliament was elected in May 1999, the figure was down to 1,062, and since then it has been cut further to 852.

The reference to
"the burden of tax and red tape"

in the Tory motion is interesting. The phrase "red tape" disguises the same old right-wing Conservative agenda, according to which things like health and safety regulations and the national minimum wage are routinely attacked as being a burden on business. I do not know where Annabel Goldie is today, but I suspect that if she was about in 1864 when Parliament passed the Regulation of Chimney Sweepers Act, which prevented children from being forced up chimneys, she would have been moaning about the strangulation of British industry by mile after mile of politically correct red tape. When the Tories refer to cutting red tape, what they really mean is returning to a sweat-shop economy. Much of what the Tories characterise as red tape is nothing of the sort; it refers to basic regulations to enforce a safe and fair society.

I quote from someone who was appointed by the UK Government to cut red tape:

"You cannot live in a civilised society without regulations. All those people who complain in general terms, are they seriously saying we should have a free-for-all with the environment, no restraints on health regulation or fire regulation. Once you start looking into it, it becomes much more complex."

Who was it who backed the current Government's policies on regulation? Step forward Michael Heseltine. [MEMBERS: "Oh!"] You said it.

No one wants to place unnecessary burdens on business. It is unfair to accuse the Scottish Executive or the UK Government of doing so. In fact, the truth of the matter is that, if UK regulatory impact assessments are studied, only 3 per cent of the legislation that was produced in 2001 imposed a cost on business.

Indeed, regulation can also save money and help business. Regulation allowed the operators of small power stations to generate and supply electricity without a licence. Regulation required HM Customs and Excise to pay interest on overpaid excise duty. Where we see needless environmental damage or exploitation of the individual, we take steps to tackle that through regulation, if regulation is required. That is what Governments are for and that is what Governments do.

Let us be clear: the regulatory environment is getting better. Members do not need to take my word for it. A study by Andersen and GrowthPlus benchmarked the business environment in nine EU countries and America and put the UK in top place as the country that provided the most entrepreneur-friendly environment.

I dismiss totally the Tory charge that there is too much red tape. The extra 210 Midlothian people who have found work since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament speaks volumes for the performance of our economy under the stewardship of the Scottish Executive. We will take no lectures from the Tories on the economy. I urge the chamber to reject the Conservative motion.

11:51

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): I was on my feet a couple of weeks ago talking about discipline in schools and reflecting on the fact that discipline in schools has got a lot worse in recent years. Labour claims to have the first national policy on school discipline. In retrospect, given all the head teachers and teachers who, down through time, have striven to maintain the highest standards in their schools, I find that a little cheeky.

Now that we have a national policy on discipline, we discover that discipline has got worse. In 2001-02, there was a 25 per cent rise in incidents. Last year, incidents involving physical violence rose by 26 per cent—two thirds of which were against members of school staff. In primary schools, truancy and temporary exclusions have increased by 30 per cent and, in secondary schools, the increase is 21 per cent. It was bad before, but this is worse.

Labour also claims that it has improved results in writing and maths in Scotland's schools and yet its own figures, which came out on Tuesday this week, indicate—

Brian Fitzpatrick: Will the member give way?

Colin Campbell: No, I am sorry but I only have three minutes.

Labour's figures indicate that in 2001, 59 per cent of primary 7 and 57 per cent of S2 pupils were not reaching appropriate national standards of reading. The same figures indicate that 43 per cent of primary 7 and 62 per cent of S2 pupils did not reach national standards in writing. However, the 1999 Labour manifesto in Scotland pledged that 80 per cent of primary 7 pupils would reach the appropriate standards.

We know that the much-vaunted reduction in class sizes in primaries 1, 2 and 3 to below 30 has almost been achieved, but when I went to school, class sizes were over 40. A reduction from that number to 30 would have been a triumph, but a reduction from 31 or 32 to 30 is not a major breakthrough. The fact of the matter is that every educational expert and all teachers—they are not necessarily the same people—agree that, in the initial stages of education, in primary 1, 2 and 3, massive reductions in class size are required. Everyone in the chamber knows that that can be

achieved while maintaining the teachers budget at the same level, because the demographic reduction in the number of children coming into schools will enable the figure of 18 to be met.

Whatever happened to apprentices? Labour claims to have doubled the number of people in proper apprentices. If there are "proper" apprentices, how is it that the number of 16 to 19-year olds not in education, training or employment has risen from 13 per cent to 14 per cent?

The subject of tuition fees has been bounced around the chamber already this morning.

Brian Fitzpatrick: Will the member give way?

Colin Campbell: I am sorry, but I really must move on.

Brian Fitzpatrick: This is supposed to be a debate.

Colin Campbell: Everybody—including the National Union of Students, who will be out on the streets later today—knows the truth of the matter, which is that all we have are postponed tuition fees.

Just in case the Tories think that they were any better, I am not going to let them off the hook. The fact is that we now have teachers who will not turn out voluntarily and who find it more difficult to make time to help with voluntary activities. That is largely down to the fact that the Tory Government under Mrs Thatcher did everything it possibly could to destroy the morale of the teaching profession—it engaged the profession in a long, punishing war. The Tory legacy remains and is being carried on by this Labour-Liberal Administration.

I come to my last brief sentence. Patricia Ferguson said that the Tories were great recruiters for political activism in the Labour party and the SNP, and so they were. However, the reason why my colleagues and I are in the SNP is because of the manifest failure of British political parties to deliver the best for the people of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We come to closing speeches.

11:55

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): First, I thank David McLetchie and Tory members for lodging the motion for this morning's debate. It has given those of us on the Labour benches an opportunity to record our record in Government in the first four years of the new Scottish Parliament. I also thank them for reminding us all that the electorate has a long memory—thank goodness it has, otherwise we could forget the ideology of the Tory years. The widening gap between rich and poor and the alienation of our young people will not be forgotten.

It is mainly because of the 18 years of Thatcherism that members on the Labour benches are ideologically committed to driving forward the social justice agenda. We want to tackle inequalities in health and housing. Alex Fergusson said that rural Scotland believes that the Parliament has not been a success. I do not believe that. The Parliament has been a good voice for the communities of rural Scotland and it will go on to do more.

Whatever the criticisms of the central heating programme, it is impossible to deny its success. It is quite ridiculous for Christine Grahame to stand up in the chamber and criticise an unprecedented programme as she did. People in my constituency, who live in Glasgow tenements, have never had central heating in their lives. Thanks to the coalition Government, the programme is now happening.

The principle of the state providing nursery places for three and four-year-olds is the principle that matters. Nursery provision is not only good for children; it is good for their mothers and fathers. It assists them in their busy lives to improve their quality of life.

The Scottish Parliament has passed the best tenants' rights package, which has given security to those who live in social rented accommodation. As Karen Whitefield rightly said, the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 will be an important measure in our commitment to tackle homelessness.

I heard Fergus Ewing say that every single thing that the Executive has done is a failure, but he must have missed the mood of the electorate if he thinks that people will be impressed by that. The symbolism of funding the purchase of the Health Care International hospital—a private hospital—with public money is of major significance to many Scots in the west of Scotland. Everyone should congratulate the Executive on having brought that facility into the NHS. It is an indication of whether the NHS should be public or private.

Patricia Ferguson was right to remind the chamber of what life in the NHS was like under the Tories. Nurses had to deal with a two-stage pay offer—they were not given the dignity of a one-off pay deal. Performance-related pay was forced on our nurses and they had to pay for their own conversion from enrolled to registered status. It is no wonder that our nurses were beginning to leave the health service.

Worst of all was the internal market. It meant forced competition in our public services, and hospitals having to cost their operations to sell them to neighbouring hospital trusts. We are still clearing up the mess of the internal market. Members must recognise that last week's white

paper will eradicate the last vestiges of the internal market. If members believe in a public NHS, they will acknowledge that that is a significant step forward.

The agenda for change means change not only for nurses and midwives, but for low-paid health service workers, who for the first time will have a minimum rate of pay that is well above the established minimum wage. That is what we stand for and what we think is important.

We take crime and law and order seriously. Serious and violent offenders will be dealt with under new sentencing policy. I mention also the introduction of drugs courts, the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency and youth courts. We are also tackling racism: a racist element cannot now be dropped from a crime if there is evidence to support it. We take such equalities issues seriously. For the first time, victims of crime will be central to the criminal justice system.

I am not sure how long I have, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: You have six minutes, but the time limit is not obligatory.

Phil Gallie: I see that the member is struggling. Will she give way now? [*Laughter.*]

Pauline McNeill: The most common complaint that I have received about schools and learning is that children are being taught in crumbling buildings. It is simply not right for people not to recognise the importance of building and repairing schools.

Brian Fitzpatrick is quite correct to point out that no Government takes its support for granted. This coalition certainly does not do so. We stand on our record, our comprehensive approach to government and the 63 bills that have been passed. We have strengthened public services, and have taken the work force with us by giving them the benefits of what we believe in.

Andrew Wilson accused us of aiming for mediocrity—he might know a bit about that himself. The public sector, industry and business would not agree that they are mediocre and certainly believe that they are striving for success. Labour believes that the best way of securing Scotland's success is to continue our partnership with the UK. We benefit from low inflation and low interest rates; indeed, borrowing money has never been cheaper in this country. At the same time, we can shape our public services in a distinctly Scottish way. That is the benefit of the devolved settlement.

It is about time that the nationalists got honest with the electorate about what fiscal autonomy means to them. It is SNP-speak for independence. They should say what they mean, because they do not do so very often. If they used the i-word,

they might be respected for it. The SNP simply claims that anything that the Executive can do, it can do better, but there is no evidence that the electorate believes that, and I suppose that we will see whether the claim is true in the weeks and months to come.

We on this side of the chamber believe in social progress, social justice, a vibrant Scottish economy and stability in this new Parliament. We stand on our record.

The Presiding Officer: Before I call the next speaker, I remind members that those who have taken part in the debate are supposed to be present to listen to the winding-up speeches. I notice that some members are not in the chamber.

12:02

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): There were great hopes for the Parliament and what it would be able to do once it was established. However, somewhere along the line, the Executive's performance became confused with the Parliament's democracy—after all, the performance of the Government at Downing Street is rarely confused with the job of the Westminster Parliament. Whether accidentally or deliberately, the Scottish Executive and its failures have been confused with the Parliament and its performance. That situation must not be allowed to stand.

Although the debate has allowed Parliament to focus quite deliberately on the Executive's performance, it has all been rather sad and bitter. We have been in something of a time warp with all the references to the record of the Tories during the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, the time that the Executive parties have spent on that period betrays its lack of confidence in its own record, although I make an honourable exception for Brian Fitzpatrick's considered speech. [MEMBERS: "Oh."] I see that he is worried now. Can I have some more time for that moment of incredulity, Presiding Officer?

I worry about the legacy that the Executive will leave after its first term. We have had a series of different ministers introducing variations of different programmes; however, all have taken a similar approach, which is to micromanage relative decline. Through management-speak processes and misplaced and meaningless target-led government, the Executive has created and promoted a culture that is inward-looking, controlling and obsessed with change, but it has also created a culture of "Meet the target" rather than "Make the change." It has fostered performance that is measured by Government targets; it makes meeting Government health targets a stumbling block to meeting patients' needs and it makes meeting external assessments a stumbling block to meeting pupils' needs.

Brian Fitzpatrick: The member said that I made a “considered speech”. Does she agree that it is important to be careful about what we say about targets? No one on the Executive parties’ benches would want targets to get in the way of better health services or educational attainment. However, as Audit Scotland in this country and the Audit Commission in England have recently pointed out, we need targets in order that we know where we are going. Given the mess in which the Conservatives left the health service, for example, we need targets to indicate where improvements can be found. Is the member saying that all targets should be put in the bin?

The Presiding Officer: Order. The member has had quite long enough for his intervention.

Fiona Hyslop: I think that I must have touched Brian Fitzpatrick earlier. I apologise for doing so.

We need targets and strategies, but we do not need meaningless targets that get in the way of progress. The Executive should be giving Parliament a strategy, vision and direction that will make a real difference to people’s lives; instead, its suffocation of Scotland will condemn us to governance that is more like the shadow of a regional council.

We needed a bonfire of the quangos and we needed to get rid of the duplication of department and quango that the Tories devised before devolution in order to bypass Labour councils. We needed a smaller and leaner Government, but we did not get it. We needed an end to jobs for the boys. We needed public services that are public, an end to the march to privatisation and excess profits from public services and we needed respect and courtesy from Government for public sector workers, but all we get is blame and name-calling. Finally, we needed democracy, decentralisation, transparency and accountability, but we got only limited movement on those.

I agree with Mike Rumbles that the next Executive must put reform of local government finance, proportional representation and governance issues at centre stage. The problem is that the Executive has had four years to do so—members of the Labour party have had six years—but we have seen no significant movement. Although we have heard everything about how to deal with the symptoms of poverty and the underperformance of the economy, there has been little vision and less action to tackle the core problems that the country faces.

Roseanna Cunningham and Andrew Wilson highlighted the economic growth problems that face Scotland. Our economy has great potential that is not being realised, so I ask Murdo Fraser to listen carefully to this fact: if Scotland had matched the UK economy’s modest growth since Labour

came to power and if it had had responsibility for raising as well as for distributing tax, we would have had £2 billion more of revenue to invest in health and education. Indeed, if we had matched Ireland’s economic growth, we would have had £13 billion more.

I was very struck by the Labour party’s silence on its health service record. We know that waiting times are 18 days longer than they were in 1999. Moreover, its election pledge to bring down waiting lists by 10,000 was conveniently dumped when it realised what everyone had been saying. Those figures are now up by 10,000. That is some progress and some performance. There are now 1,869 nursing vacancies, which is an increase of 46 per cent since Labour came to power, and there are 600 fewer hospital beds than there were in 1999. Wards are frequently closed and operations cancelled; indeed, 15,500 operations were cancelled last year. We are paying the price of PFI.

As for free personal care, George Lyon said that it was the flagship policy of the Executive parties. Well, the only flag I saw in that respect was Tom McCabe’s white flag on an SNP motion. It was the Parliament that delivered free personal care. I must also point out that tuition fees have been subject to a pantomime-horse manoeuvre—they have been moved from the front end to the back end. However, everyone knows that they are still there; as the audience shouts in theatres at panto time, “They’re behind you!”

The Executive has hardly made a dent in poverty. Although there have been worthy and necessary education and health initiatives, they do not tackle the core problem of economic underperformance. We are seeing a new generation of the working poor. We need a high-waged and highly skilled work force to ensure that we can all share in the country’s economic growth and lift our children out of poverty. In that respect, someone should remind Bill Butler that the real rate of unemployment in Glasgow is 23.7 per cent. Under this Labour Government, the gap between the rich and poor has grown.

Bill Butler: Will the member give way?

Fiona Hyslop: Unfortunately, I will not; the member did not take an intervention from me.

I want to refer to the Government’s document “Recording Our Achievements”, and its list of legislative achievements. Do members remember the Erskine Bridge Tolls Act 2001? That emergency legislation was needed because the Executive forgot to renew collection laws. The Criminal Procedure (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2002 covered up a legal loophole and the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill largely enacts a European directive. Such double-counting occurs throughout the document.

The document smacks of panic measures as the Executive realises that the public do not feel that the Executive has made any difference and have not experienced any improvements in their lives or their families' lives. As a result, the Executive needs to print another self-justifying brochure to tell people that there have been improvements. The Executive is so unconfident about the public's experiences of its achievements that it must produce propaganda prompts that are paid for by the public purse.

Four years on, the world views the Executive's performance as one big let-down. We have had all the deputy ministers and ministers of three different Administrations with two different programmes for Government. The targets that were set were either so easy that they would not be reached, or were so vacuous as to be meaningless. The achievements, all of which were either already in train or would have happened regardless of the hue of the Government, have been dressed in semantics to allow the Executive to pretend that it has done something when it clearly has not. Given such leadership of the country, is it any wonder that public cynicism about politicians is growing?

The public is not, however, cynical about democracy or the need for this Parliament. We cannot, and should not, allow the lack of impact of the Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive to stand in the way of the progress of Parliament. We need a Government that will make the most of Parliament and which will help it grow, rather than limit it by micromanagement. We need a Government that makes social justice a touchstone for delivery and economic growth a driver for change. We need a Government that has the determination to release the potential of this country and the drive to achieve the powers of independence that will let Scotland be all that it can be. We need a Government that has ambition for Scotland—that Government is an SNP Government.

12:11

The Deputy Minister for Parliamentary Business (Euan Robson): We have had an interesting and wide-ranging debate. We have heard some predictable contributions, as well as speculation about what Andrew Wilson will or will not do in his bath tonight. As to "rough wooing", I think that Roseanna Cunningham must have been chewing lemons all morning—doubtless to get the tone of her amendment just right.

Let me start with the legislative programme. By the end of this Parliament, we will have passed 50 Executive bills—an impressive legislative achievement for a new Parliament. As members will recall, the legislation that has been passed

ranges from the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, to the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, to the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and the wide-ranging Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill. We have also made smaller valuable changes that would have waited—indeed, did wait—years for progress at Westminster.

Ministers have recognised that the Parliament's committee system has made a major contribution to legislation. That contribution has been made by members of all political parties. It does the Parliament no credit for the Tories to denigrate that record, but that seems to be the purpose of the "No, no" leader of the "No, no" party, which is still fighting the challenges of devolution. The "noes" continue: no alternative budget and no amendment to the budget has ever been presented by the Tories in the past four years. Brian Fitzpatrick made that point eminently clear in his speech. It must also be said that the Tories have introduced very little in the way of members' bills, apart from a measure on dog fouling, which required Executive assistance.

Public services are improving across the Executive's five priority areas. Through reform and modernisation, we are ensuring that we get best value for every public pound. Our reform programmes throughout the public services are focused on ensuring that services meet the needs of those who use and need the services. We are empowering local people to take the decisions to promote first-class services. We are putting in much-needed investment in school buildings, in transport infrastructure, in IT and in modern equipment. We are modernising the services that we deliver to people.

That modernisation is yielding impressive results. In health, there are more doctors and nurses in our hospitals. The new HCI hospital is available to all NHS Scotland patients in order that we can tackle waiting lists. As members from all round the chamber have said on several occasions, we have also introduced free personal care. The emphasis is now rightly on examining the causes of ill health. A major agenda is being developed that will ensure healthier lifestyles so that in future Scotland has a health service rather than a service that treats sickness.

In education, we have 100 new or refurbished school buildings and we have reduced class sizes in primaries 1, 2 and 3. As members from all round the chamber have pointed out, a pre-school place is available for every three-year-old and four-year-old whose parents want them to attend. Brian Monteith mentioned the McCrone settlement, which he acknowledged had provided better pay and conditions for teachers. There are developing issues around McCrone and those must be

addressed. However, the fundamental truths are that teachers are now better paid and have better conditions.

Mr Monteith: The minister might have sat through my speech with a fixed expression, casting doubt on all I had to say, but surely the truth is that local authorities claim that they are not well enough funded. I cite the example of schools in Stirling, where teaching positions are being merged to ensure that the schools have the funding to introduce McCrone. Is not that the case?

Euan Robson: I served in local government and I do not recall a year when local government did not say that it did not have enough money. I say to Mr Monteith that such decisions as he mentioned are to be taken locally. I cannot comment on the situation in Stirling because I do not know the circumstances. I was interested that Mr Monteith acknowledged that better pay and conditions were being achieved.

We have the highest crime clear-up rates since the second world war, which is important for the people of Scotland. Illegal drugs seizures are up by some £37.5 million and we have installed 1,170 closed circuit television cameras to detect and prevent crime.

We have been improving transport and we have introduced free off-peak local travel for older and disabled people, as Karen Whitefield rightly said. Bristow Muldoon commented on road and rail investment. I do not know where Mr McLetchie has been recently, but he has certainly not driven down the A1, on which £45 million has been invested—£5 million worth of which is in my constituency. That situation was ignored by Mrs Grahame—the prophetess of doom. We have tackled congestion by removing 17,000,000 lorry miles from Scotland's roads. As George Lyon said, the track record of the Tories on railways was deplorable and it is taking time to turn that around.

The Opposition says that we have not achieved a stronger economy. Jobs are one of our five key priorities and again, the facts speak for themselves. There are 98,000 more people in jobs in Scotland than there were in 1999.

David Mundell: Mr Robson is listing achievements, but we read in the press that it is the Liberal Democrats that make the difference. Perhaps the minister could tell his Labour colleagues behind him which of those achievements they would not have managed had they formed a minority Government without the Liberal Democrats to urge them on.

Euan Robson: Far be it from me to criticise what Mr Mundell has said, but the achievements of the coalition are shared by the parties, both of which rightly bring distinctive characteristics to the coalition.

We have built the success that I have been recording by supporting education and training to boost the economy and let young people make the most of their potential. As has frequently been referred to, we have scrapped student tuition fees and there are now 60,000 more enrolments in further and higher education. As George Lyon said, 50 per cent of school leavers now go into higher education. There are 20,000 modern apprenticeships. Through our five core priorities we are strengthening the economy and driving up standards in our public services.

On rural development, the Executive is committed to promoting prosperity and improving the quality of life throughout Scotland. We are making progress in a number of areas. Some 108 projects have been introduced to support public transport in rural areas. If I might refer to the desultory comments of Mrs Grahame, much of that investment has gone into my constituency in Hawick, for example, where about £1 million has been put in through public transport support.

We are on track and ready to deliver two national parks: Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park, which is already open, and the Cairngorms national park, to which Mike Rumbles referred. The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill is on track to be implemented in 2003. I was disappointed by Alex Fergusson's speech—he kept saying that Ross Finnie attracted the “easy headlines”. Let me tell him this: the farming community thoroughly respects Ross Finnie. He is considered to be one of the best agriculture ministers there has ever been. If Alex Fergusson thinks that Ross Finnie attracts the easy headlines, Mr Fergusson should consider Mr Finnie's handling of the foot-and-mouth outbreak; there were no easy headlines to be had there. I was very disappointed that Alex Fergusson could not give credit to Ross Finnie for all the effort that he has put in.

We have established the rural partnership for change to address rural housing issues. In my own constituency, the first housing stock transfer in Scotland will ensure a massive extra investment in housing in the Borders. That is a fact that was also studiously ignored by Mrs Grahame.

Christine Grahame: Three mentions!

Mr Monteith: Three strikes and you're out.

Euan Robson: I can go on; I have plenty more. I will say, however, that the central problem that the Conservatives have is that they do not accept the devolution settlement. Not only that, but while they argue for tax cuts, they turn up here looking for more expenditure. It is a circle that they cannot complete—their position is simply impossible and fundamentally dishonest. If one were to invite the Tory leadership to dinner, I suggest that one should count the cutlery before they left.

The Executive's record in its first four years of devolution is impressive, but I know that there is still much to be done. There are many intractable problems in Scotland, which the next Executive will address. However, many concrete improvements are now in place that will make the lives of Scotland's people better. In four short years, the Executive has achieved a huge amount. We have shown that devolution can work for Scotland and will work for Scotland. I support the Executive amendment.

12:21

Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):

It was entirely appropriate that the Conservative party took the opportunity of the last non-Executive time allocated to us in this Parliament to lodge a motion that put the Executive's record under scrutiny. It is important that we, as an Opposition party, ensure that we scrutinise the record of the Executive. It is our fundamental reason for being here and will continue to be our priority right until the end of this Parliament.

At the end of this session, we will move to the next one; the coalition parties will perhaps have a chance of being the Opposition and we can perhaps have a chance of being the Executive—*[Interruption.]* I hear shouts of "Dream on," but we must remember that any party that enters Parliament to make a serious contribution to Scotland's way of life must aspire to hold power in Scotland. The Conservative party is prepared to make that commitment in the coming election and at any subsequent election. We will not turn our back on the people of Scotland, but will defend the interests of those who seek to have us defend them.

There are many people in Scotland who rely on the Conservative party and there are many who do not vote for us, or have not done so in recent years, but who still rely on our presence. There is not a huge majority within Scotland that supports the notions of socialism—there are still those who see wealth creation as being at least as great a priority as spending. That is why we see ourselves as the guardians of the economy in Scotland and as the party that will continue to defend wealth creation as the means by which the economy will ultimately provide the opportunity to spend.

We have heard a great deal of prejudice today. We have been subjected yet again to the assumption that, because we are Conservatives, we have not been through the state school system and have no experience of the national health service, but that could not be further from the truth. Like all other members, we know only too well what the services that are provided in this country have been in recent years. It is ironic that, as we debate the points that have been raised today, we

hear—especially from the Labour party, but in a particularly whining tone from the Liberal Democrats—the notion that everything that has been good in the past six years has been the responsibility of those on the coalition benches, and that everything that has been bad is the legacy of a previous Conservative Government. Anyone who believes that must be naive. We have had a long period during which Labour has either formed the Government or has been a significant part of it, yet it shows no acceptance of the responsibilities that it must face.

We have heard far too much today about the idea that tax must be increased in order to secure greater expenditure. Gordon Brown has, unfortunately, had to begin to learn the lessons of the mistakes of that policy. We can now only hope that some members in this chamber will learn those lessons. When, as a legacy of the Conservative Government, the total tax take was 39 per cent of gross domestic product, Gordon Brown made great play of the fact that he was paying back the national debt hand over fist. Now that the total tax take is up to almost 42 per cent of GDP, we suddenly find ourselves with one of the largest public sector borrowing requirements that the country has had. Those who blindly follow the tax and spend lead need quickly to learn a lesson from that.

Bill Butler: In the spirit of the pursuit of scientific proof, does the member care to admit to any failure of the Conservative legacy from 1979 to 1997?

Alex Johnstone: I have a great confession to make: there is one failure of which I am ashamed, which is our failure to win the 1997 election.

On today's debate, we heard the accusation early in the debate that the Conservatives never believed in this Parliament and that we are not prepared to take our place in it. I hope that we have given the lie to that, not only today but over the past four years. It is our duty to represent our constituencies in this Parliament. We will therefore ensure, whatever our position was prior to the Parliament's creation, that our role as a democratic party in Scotland is to be within Parliament defending the rights and interests of those who put us here.

We heard that 50 bills have passed through the Parliament; there is an element of "Never mind the quality, feel the width." Many of the bills have been efforts to catch up on what many saw as 300 years of back-business.

Euan Robson: Which bills did Mr Johnstone not want to be passed?

Alex Johnstone: The Fur Farming (Prohibition) (Scotland) Bill would have been top of that list, given that there were no fur farms in Scotland.

On one day, during the passage of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, we made illegal two things that were already illegal, but which were required to be made illegal for a second time in order to satisfy political correctness.

There have been some interesting interventions from the Liberal Democrats during the debate. I must thank George Lyon for his speech; I always find his speeches entertaining. The speech was especially entertaining when he referred to the “flagship policy” of free personal care, when he expressed his enthusiastic support for PFI and when he claimed to have been personally responsible for ending tuition fees. I have to say to George Lyon and the rest of the Liberal Democrats that not a single one of their achievements, which they trumpet so often, could not have been achieved more effectively by voting with the Opposition rather than with the Executive.

The interests of members such as Iain Smith never cease to amaze me. His notion of what Conservative policy constitutes defies even the understanding of we who are in the Conservative party. We hope that some day we might be able to educate him.

George Lyon: Will Mr Johnstone take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No, not at this stage—I am about to go on to speak about Mike Rumbles.

I have to admit that I am one of Mike Rumbles’s constituents; I live in the heart of his constituency. He has managed to portray himself—today in particular—as the friend of the Scottish Executive, but back home he portrays himself as the leader of the Opposition. This week, I am sure that Mr Rumbles will, in the pages of the *Mearns Leader*, praise health expenditure in Grampian. That will be praise that has been conspicuous by its absence in the previous three years.

The Conservatives believe that our programme of policies will bring us success in the Scottish elections. We want to make councils more accountable to their local communities so that they can deliver better services and provide better value for money. We want to reduce the ring fencing of Executive grants to give councils the freedom to determine local policies.

Brian Fitzpatrick: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: Not at this stage.

As Mary Scanlon said, we want to devolve power to local hospitals and GPs so that doctors and nurses have more say in how the NHS is run and so that the NHS responds to the needs of local people. We want to ensure that money follows the patient in the NHS so that patients have real choice about the treatment they receive.

We want to create a partnership between the NHS and the independent sector so that all facilities are used to cut waiting lists and times for NHS patients. We want to unify the health and social work care budgets to provide decent care in the community for older people.

On the economy, we will cut business rates to ensure that our businesses operate on a level playing field with those south of the border. We will reduce the burden of unnecessary red tape by instituting a programme of repeal of all laws and regulations that have no proven worth or need. The figures prove that such legislation strangles growth in the Scottish economy. We will also spend an extra £100 million a year on roads to help large and small businesses to develop.

Iain Smith: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: I am finishing up.

We will improve standards and choice in education by increasing substantially the number of specialist schools in order to give parents real choice. We will give schools greater freedom so that head teachers and school boards can set their own educational priorities and allocate their budgets, and we will allow head teachers to exclude violent and disruptive pupils. We will abolish the £2,000 a year graduate tax and replace it with a saltire award scheme to cover the cost of university tuition.

We will be tough on crime. We will provide a more visible crime-fighting presence on our streets in order to deter and detect crime. We will widen the disposals that are available to the children’s hearings system and we will increase the number of secure accommodation places. We will restore confidence in the Scottish justice system by ensuring that offenders serve the sentences that are handed down in court. We will also ensure that alternatives to prison, such as community service, actually work. We will deal with drug crime by ensuring the fast-track prosecution of drug-related crimes and allowing judges to hand down higher sentences for those crimes. It is ironic that the Minister for Justice is Jim Wallace, when there have been leaked documents from the Labour party criticising the Liberal Democrats for being weak on crime. The Conservatives guarantee a return to a strong performance on crime.

On the rural economy, we will ensure that farmers and fishermen get a fair deal from the European Union and that there are stricter import controls on meat. We will give control back to fishermen through local fisheries devolution.

We will also ensure that, in line with the Scotland Act 1998, the number of members of the Scottish Parliament is reduced to 108 and we will streamline the Parliament’s committee system and reduce the size of the Cabinet.

This debate is our final opportunity to give our views on what we believe Scotland could achieve with a more appropriate programme of government, which we have outlined in detail. I commend our motion to members.

Business Motion

12:33

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We come to business motion S1M-3976, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, which is set out in the business bulletin.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 12 March 2003

9:30 am Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 3 of Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Bill

2:30 pm Continuation of Stage 3 of Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5:00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business – debate on the subject of S1M-3953 Dr Richard Simpson: New Forth Road Bridge Crossing Near Kincardine

Thursday 13 March 2003

9:30 am Scottish National Party Business

followed by Business Motion

2:30 pm Question Time

3:10 pm First Minister's Question Time

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

3:30 pm Stage 3 of Dog Fouling (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5:00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business – debate on the subject of S1M-3932 David Mundell: Post Office Card Accounts

Wednesday 19 March 2003

9:30 am Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 3 of Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Bill

2:30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Continuation of Stage 3 Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5:00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 20 March 2003

9:30 am Continuation of Stage 3 of Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Business Motion

2:30 pm Question Time

3:10 pm First Minister's Question Time

3:30 pm Continuation of Stage 3 of Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Motion on Sexual Offences Bill – UK Legislation

Motion on Railways and Transport Safety Bill – UK Legislation

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5:00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business - debate on the subject of S1M-3897 Kenneth Gibson: Suicide Emergency Telephone Hotline

and (b) that the Justice 1 Committee reports to the Justice 2 Committee by 17 March 2003 on the Sheriff Court Fees Amendment Order 2003 (SSI 2003/97) and that the Justice 2 Committee reports to the Justice 1 Committee by 17 March 2003 on the draft Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Order 2003.—[*Euan Robson.*]

Motion agreed to.

12:34

Meeting suspended until 14:30.

14:30

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Alcohol (Sales to Young People)

1. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to deal with the selling of alcohol to under-age young people. (S1O-6572)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): It is for the police and the prosecuting authorities to respond to reports of licensees selling alcohol to young people under 18. The Executive's plan for action on alcohol problems acknowledges that several approaches are required, including proof-of-age schemes and training for bar and off-licence staff.

Johann Lamont: Will the minister reflect on the serious impact that the selling of alcohol to young people has on the peace of mind and security of many of my constituents who have to live with the subsequent disorder, vandalism and aggression? Does he agree that it is urgent that we adopt a more rigorous approach to dealing with those who knowingly sell drink to under-age young people and to adults who pass alcohol on? In particular, will he examine how the use of young people in the test purchasing of cigarettes and solvents might be extended to alcohol so that shopkeepers who are willing to bolster their profits in that way can be exposed and dealt with effectively?

Hugh Henry: I share Johann Lamont's concerns. A test-purchasing scheme involving tobacco sales is under way and will be examined to see how successful and effective it is.

Johann Lamont also referred to the scheme that was started in Fife, which arose from a debate sponsored by Marilyn Livingstone to which Fife Council responded. Fife Council is considering some of the issues surrounding shopkeepers who sell to under-age children. That will be different from the tobacco scheme, the evidence from which could be used for prosecution purposes. The local authority is running a solvent-abuse scheme to identify the extent of the problem.

There would be nothing to prevent authorities such as Glasgow City Council from reacting as Fife Council has done and testing the extent of illegal sales. From any evidence gathered, we could reflect on what has to be done.

The Crown Office and the Executive have made it clear that we will act on the information gathered from the tobacco scheme. Anything that Fife

Council, or any other authority that has responded to Johann Lamont's point, can do will be of benefit and use to us.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): Does the minister agree that, as we consider a review of licensing terms and conditions, we could consider giving courts the opportunity to deal with such breaches by means of the temporary suspension of a licence? In view of the loss of revenue to the licensee, that is more likely to be successful than a straightforward court fine.

Hugh Henry: There are complex issues surrounding what Bill Aitken has suggested. If the tobacco-purchasing and solvent-abuse scheme identifies issues of concern, we will reflect on what has to be done.

The clear message has to go out from the Parliament that, as Johann Lamont says, irresponsible shopkeepers who are prepared to damage the health of young people will face harsh penalties and we will not tolerate them.

Council Tax System

2. Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether there are any plans to change the council tax system and, if so, when and in what way. (S10-6576)

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): We have no plans to change the council tax system at present.

Tommy Sheridan: Is the minister aware that council tax in Scotland has increased by 62 per cent in the past seven years, and by 72 per cent in Scotland's poorest city, Glasgow? Is he aware that the council tax is unfair because it hammers pensioners and low-paid Scots while pampering the wealthy and the millionaires? Does he agree that it is time to replace the unfair council tax with an income-based tax in order to redistribute wealth in Scotland?

Mr Kerr: No, I do not agree with the member. The real-terms increase in council tax levels since 1997-98 is 12.9 per cent. I congratulate 30 out of 32 of our local authorities for maintaining the indicative levels for their council tax increases.

I do not support the tax system that the member wants to introduce, which would undermine accountability and lead to fiscal flight. Two people on the average wage would pay more under Tommy Sheridan's scheme, which would ignore the assistance that council tax benefit gives people in need. His system would be unstable, unsound and complex, and the tax would be expensive to collect.

The council tax system delivers for Scotland's communities. It delivers a tax that is easy to collect and that allows our local authorities to provide valuable public services.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): If the Executive is unwilling to consider radical council tax reform immediately, will it consider at least restructuring the banding system to eradicate unfair anomalies whereby people whose houses have widely varying values pay the same amount of council tax? Would it not be fairer to introduce more bands?

Mr Kerr: As the member probably knows, council tax revaluation is scheduled to be undertaken in Wales in 2005, in England in 2007 and at 10-year intervals after that. Scotland's non-domestic rate revaluation will take place in 2005. Between now and then, we will consider the implications of the measures that have been described. However, we do not intend to take action. We must get the non-domestic rate revaluation out of the way before the Executive considers whether there are any other measures that it wishes to take.

Benefits (Payment Method)

3. Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what representations have been made to the Department for Work and Pensions about the impact of changes to the method of payment of benefits on urban and rural communities. (S10-6590)

The Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): Pensions and benefits matters are reserved. The Scottish Executive is in regular contact with United Kingdom ministers and departments on a range of issues, which include how benefits are paid.

Mr Ingram: Does the minister agree that the Executive has some responsibility for ensuring that our elderly citizens receive proper information and education about the changes, so that they can make informed decisions about managing their finances? What are the Executive's plans on that?

Ms Curran: I agree that the Executive has responsibility for ensuring that all our citizens are informed about matters that are of great importance to them. As I have said many times in the chamber, we have a comprehensive programme for financial literacy, which we are trying to encourage through our funding of credit unions and many other initiatives. We also launched in December last year a fund of £2 million to develop post offices in deprived urban areas. That enables us to assist in the Labour Government's delivery of the modernisation programme and to ensure that people are adequately informed, so that they can maximise their opportunities.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that one of the most

significant impacts on urban and rural communities of the changes to the benefits payment method might be on post offices? Does she share my concern that much of the literature published by UK Government departments does not make it sufficiently clear that people can receive their benefits through the new Post Office card account?

Ms Curran: I make it clear that the DWP has responded to concerns that were expressed in Scotland and is undertaking a range of initiatives that will deal with David Mundell's points. The department is to arrange a meeting with Age Concern Scotland in the near future to address immediate concerns and will undertake other initiatives to ensure that information is issued.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I accept that the matter is reserved, but does the minister share my serious concern about the impact on post offices and therefore on the quality of life of the people of Scotland? Will she make the strongest representations on the issue to the UK Government—with which she has good contact—because it affects the viability of post offices in many rural and urban communities?

Ms Curran: I understand Keith Raffan's comments, which he has made before. My colleague, Allan Wilson, has made strong representations about the matters raised. We understand the significance of post offices and the contribution that they make to urban and rural communities. That is why we have provided £2 million of funding and why the DWP has responded and will continue to respond to concerns. The DWP believes, and we accept, that it can deliver the modernisation project, which is significant. It will also address the social justice concerns that Keith Raffan flagged up, which Allan Wilson's representations dealt with.

Civil Service Posts (Dispersal)

4. Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Executive on what criteria its decisions to disperse civil service and executive agency posts are based. (S10-6586)

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): Relocation decisions are based on a range of factors, including costs, the quality and efficiency of service, economic factors such as unemployment and other indicators of deprivation, the availability and suitability of staff, transport issues, environmental considerations, the position of staff and the requirements of the organisation concerned.

Ms MacDonald: I draw the minister's attention to the position in which Scottish Natural Heritage finds itself. He should treat the dispersal that is already evident in that agency as something of a

prototype and model. Instead of pursuing some unholy grail to disperse people if they are not nailed down, should not he realise that losing between 50 per cent and 75 per cent of its staff in a dispersal programme from now on would not be in that agency's best interests?

Mr Kerr: The Executive closely considers such matters in discussions. The holy grail in the case in question is to disperse jobs to parts of the country that can then become economically active, which will allow everybody to engage with the work of the Executive and the Parliament. Our relocation triggers allow us to make sensible decisions.

In my constituency, 2,500 people are employed by the Inland Revenue and more than 500 people are employed by the Department for International Development in East Kilbride. I think that we would lose those jobs under the policies of the member's former party. We want to ensure that we provide relocation for real jobs throughout Scotland to effect an impact on our communities rather than provide dislocation, which there would be under the policies of the member's former party.

Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con): In applying the criteria, is the minister limited to discussing only Scottish Government and civil service jobs? Does the option still exist to attract United Kingdom civil service and Government jobs to Scotland? Does he pursue such issues?

Mr Kerr: We are constantly engaged with fellow ministers in respect of such matters. We shout loud for Scotland when a valuable opportunity to relocate arises. The opportunity to relocate senior civil service jobs in Scotland would be lost under the SNP.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Whitehall rather stole a march on us, as it has put 70 jobs in the Western Isles—doing so has been well received. The minister is aware that I am always banging the drum for Wick. Does he agree that putting pensions and information technology jobs into the far north would greatly boost the ailing economy in that part of Caithness?

Mr Kerr: We bang a drum for all parts of Scotland. Our micro-policies seek to ensure that we put a small number of jobs into communities where a small number of jobs will have a massive impact. The Executive is committed to such policies to benefit all Scotland.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The minister will be aware of bids from Inverness for SNH and Forest Enterprise relocations. Will he take into account the operational benefits to those organisations that could be delivered through relocation to Inverness?

Mr Kerr: I am aware of the member's close interest in such matters through letters and correspondence with her. A strong case is being made. The Executive must look at good opportunities throughout Scotland to allow services to be delivered and staff to engage properly within the process, and to ensure that we continue to deliver first-class, high-quality public services. The Executive considers such matters and we seek to make announcements in the near future.

Emergency Ambulances (Dumfries and Galloway)

5. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the provision of emergency ambulances in Dumfries and Galloway is adequate. (S10-6570)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Frank McAveety): From 1999-2000 to date, the Scottish Ambulance Service has seen an increase of more than 40 per cent in emergency demand in the Dumfries and Galloway area. Despite that increase, the service in that area is achieving a response time that is higher than its targets. The Scottish Ambulance Service will continue to monitor and review ambulance provision, not just in Dumfries and Galloway but throughout Scotland to ensure that demand and response time standards are met.

Alasdair Morgan: The figures that the minister has given hide the fact that, within certain stations in Dumfries and Galloway, the number of emergency calls has increased by well over 100 per cent in the past couple of years. Given that fact and the increased pressure from inter-hospital transfers—such as from Stranraer to Dumfries or from Dumfries to Edinburgh and Glasgow—will the minister at least undertake to investigate whether the local service has sufficient resources to meet demand? Increasing concerns are certainly being passed on to me by constituents.

Mr McAveety: I would be happy to explore the concerns that the member has raised. However, we have already invested in the Dumfries and Galloway area to change accident and emergency provision to full-time working at the Stranraer unit, which is meeting some of the increased demand. We are also providing two accident and emergency vehicles 24 hours a day. We have tried to address many of the concerns by increasing overall resources by almost 10 per cent in the period that I mentioned. As we have said, we are happy to look at the situation throughout Scotland and to monitor accident and emergency services to ensure that we are delivering the highest-quality service in accident and emergency and non-emergency work.

Pollution

6. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it is making in tackling pollution. (S10-6595)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): The Executive has made progress in tackling pollution. The quality of our rivers, estuaries and coastal waters is steadily improving, with investment in improved sewage treatment playing a major role. Parliament has passed the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill, which will improve our ability to enhance the protection of the water environment.

Air quality is generally good and areas of poorer air quality in the centres of some of our major cities are being addressed through local authority action plans under the air quality strategy. Last week, I launched the national waste plan, which sets a course for a more sustainable and less polluting approach to waste management.

Helen Eadie: What steps can the minister take to assist my constituents, who have a very serious problem? We have tried to address that problem through Scottish Water, but it appears not to have the resources to deal with the matter. Sewage sludge is being left on children's playing fields in the area. Developers cannot continue to develop, despite having planning permission from the local authority because the sewage is holding up that work. The health issues are causing grave concern for the entire village. I would value the minister taking a keen interest in the matter. Clearly, he has the will to tackle such problems through the strategy, but that is not happening in practice.

Ross Finnie: I am aware of the particular problems in relation to the case raised by the member. Given the intricacies that are involved across several authorities, the appropriate action for me to take would be to write to the member with a detailed response to the question.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Is the minister aware that, over the past week or so, there has been a worrying increase in the number of radioactive particles—by way of radioactive pollution—found around Dounreay? Will he consider instructing the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to move from a process of routine monitoring to a full and detailed study of the area to get to the bottom of the scale of radioactive pollution that surrounds the area? That would help to put people in that neck of the woods much more at ease with the surrounding environment.

Ross Finnie: I am aware of the recent reports and of the testing that has produced the results. The proper course of action is to assess the

results and to discuss them with SEPA. We also speak to the radioactive waste authorities about the matter. Detailed controls are in place. We must be clear about whether the levels in the evidence to which the member refers breach the controls. If they do, that would certainly give us cause to have the review that he suggests. I assure the chamber that, as the member says, processes are in place to monitor outflows from Dounreay regularly.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): With regard to the disposal of refrigerators and the 143 tonnes of chlorofluorocarbon gases that need to be disposed of annually, is Scotland's fridge mountain still growing? When is Scotland's ability to dispose of waste fridges likely to meet the demand for the service?

Ross Finnie: As the member is aware, the Scottish Executive has given financial assistance to local authorities, both last year and this year, to assist in the storage of fridges. The installation of equipment to deal with that situation is a matter that private concerns have seen as something that they want to participate in. It is for that sector, with which John Scott will be familiar, to proceed with that work. I am not aware of any impediments that the Executive has put in place that would prevent that from happening.

Learn to Let Go

7. Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what the achievements of its learn to let go campaign have been. (S10-6568)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): The learn to let go campaign is designed to encourage people to consider a wider range of options when undertaking their daily journeys. Recent independent research indicates that it has been successful in raising travel awareness for significant numbers of people throughout Scotland.

Stewart Stevenson: Does the minister agree that, having spent £1.1 million over recent times, it is disgraceful that only now is he getting round to evaluating the research? Is he aware of research, commissioned by his own department, which states that advertising, however well designed, is unlikely to impact upon behaviour and that there is no evidence of it having such an impact? Does he recognise that the Executive has a serial addiction to spending our money on promoting its benefits and that it is the minister's party that must learn to let go over the next eight weeks?

Lewis Macdonald: An attack on advertising by the Scottish National Party is a fascinating political initiative.

I will set some of the facts straight, because Stewart Stevenson is clearly not aware of them.

The research to which I refer includes research conducted by two different agencies; it was conducted in February 2001, October 2001, December 2002 and January 2003. I am sorry that he has only now got round to reading that research but, now that he has, he will appreciate that the campaign contributes significantly to our strategy of raising awareness about the availability of public transport throughout Scotland.

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that the best way in which to get people to give up using their cars is to provide adequate public transport choices, particularly in rural Scotland? To that end, will he further the progress of the petition to reopen Laurencekirk station in Aberdeenshire?

Lewis Macdonald: I agree with Mr Davidson's point about the importance of rural public transport. I am glad to put on the record the Executive's contributions in the past few weeks, such as another £150,000 towards rural community transport in Aberdeenshire alone. Our contributions to scheduled rural bus services in Aberdeenshire are significant and, at the end of last year, we agreed to provide a further £2 million for the consideration of bus access from Aberdeenshire to Aberdeen.

The appropriate body, which is Aberdeenshire Council, is considering Laurencekirk railway station, and I look forward with interest to the council's conclusions.

Drugs and Alcohol Misuse

8. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to help children living with parents who misuse drugs and alcohol. (S10-6566)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson): The Scottish Executive issued "Getting our Priorities Right: Good Practice Guidelines for working with Children and Families affected by Substance Misuse" on 26 February 2003, which makes it clear that all relevant agencies have a responsibility to protect vulnerable children.

Donald Gorrie: Will the minister and her colleagues try to ensure that all the agencies involved work together better? People who look after children, people who deal with drugs and alcohol problems and people who try to help adults and families sometimes fail to work together as well as they could. Can she improve that situation?

Cathy Jamieson: I hope to improve the situation. The report entitled "For Scotland's children: Better integrated children's services" identified the case of a five-year-old in a drug-misusing household who had not attended school

for almost a year. That case was a result of the failure of agencies to work together. Because of such tragic circumstances, I have made it a priority to ensure that the relevant agencies join up to consider the needs of such children and young people.

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister agree that children whose parents suffer from such addictions would benefit from the provision of local detoxification, rehabilitation and throughcare facilities? Will she and her colleagues consider the development of a national strategy to provide such facilities?

Cathy Jamieson: The member will be aware of a number of pieces of work to consider the provision of treatment facilities for people who require to come off drugs. We must also ensure that the needs of children and young people in those circumstances are addressed because, for too long, the focus has been only on the adult and not on the needs of the child. Children need support in dealing with parental drugs and alcohol misuse.

Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab): I have been approached by several constituents who look after their grandchildren on a temporary or permanent basis because the parents have chaotic lifestyles as a result of drug misuse. Sadly, in some cases, the parents have died. What further measures will be considered to assist those often unhappy children to settle with their grandparents?

Cathy Jamieson: A number of initiatives provide support to such families; some support the parents with chaotic lifestyles to ensure that they look after their children, and others support the grandparents. A number of representations have been made to me on the question of how local authorities might be able to provide better support through the fostering arrangements for relatives who look after children. I intend to pursue that issue.

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): As Mr Adam pointed out, there is a dreadful shortage of facilities for such people. Does the minister agree that it is better for children to see their parents make progress? Perhaps we should make better use of the facilities in places such as Castle Craig hospital—which has 14 available places at the moment—to help parents and to allow their children to see them make progress.

Cathy Jamieson: I want children to see their parents make progress, but I also want to ensure that we get the services right for the children and young people involved. That must be part of the overall approach to the issue. It is simply not good enough that children have fallen through the net

and—as has been pointed out—have, on occasions, died because the various agencies did not get their act together and take account of the needs of the children. That is not good enough. The message that we want to send out loud and clear to all agencies is that they have a responsibility to consider the needs of the children.

Hospital Services (Lothian)

9. Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans for further development of hospital services in the Lothians. (S10-6582)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): The first phase of the new royal infirmary of Edinburgh opened on time and on budget in January last year. In May, all patient services will have transferred from the old royal infirmary. In addition, a £2.6 million development to increase capacity in accident and emergency services at St John's hospital in Livingston will open later this year.

When I launched the white paper "Partnership for Care" last week, I emphasised our aim to have a national health service that delivers faster and better-quality health care locally. NHS Lothian's plans include a new hospital for Midlothian residents, proposals to develop the hospital services that are currently provided on the site at Roodlands hospital, in Haddington, and community treatment centres in Leith and Musselburgh.

Mr Home Robertson: I am particularly grateful for the minister's reply concerning Roodlands hospital, in Haddington. He will be aware that preliminary consultations about hospital services in East Lothian established a clear consensus for a comprehensive redevelopment of Roodlands hospital to include not only its existing services but relocated mental health services. Does he acknowledge that the efficient running of the new Edinburgh royal infirmary will depend on the provision of a good range of services, including day surgery, at local hospitals? Can he give an indication of the time scale for the redevelopment of Roodlands hospital?

Malcolm Chisholm: John Home Robertson is right. Increasing the capacity of community health services is a key feature of the white paper that was published last week, and it is beginning to feature in the plans of NHS Lothian. Some of that work is already under way—for example, in the new diagnostic services and community services that are being built at the Leith community treatment centre. I very much hope that the redevelopment of Roodlands hospital will not be far behind. The outline business case is being completed this month and will be considered by NHS Lothian next month. I hope that the

developments at Roodlands hospital will take place as quickly as possible.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Is the minister aware that ward 1 of Belhaven hospital, Dunbar, is currently being operated as a nursing home? Is that where some of the 53 residents of Cockenzie House are to be placed if their nursing home closes? If not, where else are those 53 people to go? Their families and friends are desperate to know.

Malcolm Chisholm: There are complex issues to do with the care home sector. However, the public will acknowledge and appreciate the substantial contribution to resolving some of those issues that has been made by the Executive, which has amounted to £130 million over the past 18 months. I hope that the particular issue to which Christine Grahame refers is resolved. In relation to care home fees and the substantial investment that has been made in reducing delayed discharge, the Executive has made enormous progress over the past 18 months.

Road Safety

10. Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it is taking to improve road safety. (S10-6593)

The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Iain Gray): The Scottish Executive is addressing road safety through a combination of engineering, enforcement and education.

Bristow Muldoon: What impact does the minister expect that the schemes to introduce 20mph zones around schools and in residential areas will have in reducing the number of child casualties from road traffic accidents? What form of evaluation will the Executive place on such schemes?

Iain Gray: We want the number of child casualties to be reduced by 50 per cent by 2010, and we regularly monitor the figures and the progress that has been made. One of the most interesting of the trials that are under way in West Lothian, which includes Bristow Muldoon's constituency of Livingston, is the trial of part-time speed limits around schools, whereby 20mph speed limits are in place when they can have the most effect in protecting our children as they go to and from school.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): The minister is well aware of safety concerns on the section of the A77 that runs between Ayr and Ballantrae. Last week, he made a welcome announcement of road improvements to that section to address safety issues. What design-and-construct contracts have been or will be awarded for that? What is the time scale for the

completion of what are relatively small but necessary improvements?

Iain Gray: I am keen, for several different reasons, for the improvements to progress quickly. I think that Mr Gallie has written to me asking the questions that he just asked. I have sought detailed answers and I will make them available to Mr Gallie when I have them.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Will the minister audit and report on the development of home zones in Scotland?

Iain Gray: All the improvements that we make in road safety, including making roads in residential areas safer, are part of efforts that we audit regularly, both directly and through local authorities. We will continue to do that.

General Practitioner Services (Islands)

11. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment has been made of the effects of the outcome of the negotiations on general practitioner contracts on the provision of GP services in the islands. (S10-6581)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): The new general medical services contract is subject to a ballot of general practitioners that will take place between mid-March and early April. During the negotiations, a working group was established to consider and assess specific remote and rural issues, including island issues. The group's findings have been reflected in the new contract, which addresses the needs of patients in remote and rural areas in a number of ways and promises to alleviate many of the pressures that currently exist in those settings.

Tavish Scott: I thank the minister for his reply, particularly for his point about pressure on island GP practices. Will he ensure that the negotiations reflect the difficulties in retaining doctors that the Lerwick doctors' practice and Shetland NHS Board are facing? Does he accept that the Lerwick practice is running with only 50 per cent of its recommended doctor work force? Given that recruitment and, crucially, retention are widespread difficulties for island and rural GP practices, will he consider measures, particularly out-of-hours cover, to help those areas?

Malcolm Chisholm: I was sorry to hear that a further GP will leave the Lerwick practice at the end of June. I spoke to the chief executive of Shetland NHS Board about that today. She said that someone had been recruited to start in Lerwick in July. However, that will not lessen the problems that exist there. The new contract that has been agreed—subject to the ballot of GPs—will offer substantial opportunities not only for island areas, but for areas throughout Scotland.

There will be a 33 per cent increase in primary care services. That is an important development, which is consistent with the messages of the "Partnership for Care" white paper about the importance of developing more services in primary care, particularly community health partnerships, which we emphasised during last week's debate.

Part of the new contract will be a statutory patient service guarantee. I am aware of the concerns about the provision of out-of-hours cover. However, other options are open to GPs, including not having to deliver that cover themselves, which are helpful in terms of GPs' work load and recruiting people into general practice. All patients will be guaranteed an out-of-hours service.

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): In the negotiations, are any special incentives being offered to attract GPs to work on islands? Will the minister consider offering travel warrants? The cost of travel is an aspect that makes people unwilling to live on an island, because they would be unable to afford to keep in touch with people on the mainland.

Malcolm Chisholm: The agreed funding arrangements are responsive to the extra cost of delivering care in island areas. Indeed, the group to which I referred earlier included an Orkney GP, so particular account was taken of the islands. Funding for general practices on the islands will be increased and that will make the islands more attractive for GPs to work on in the future.

Charity Law Reform

12. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what arrangements it has made for consultation with the voluntary sector during the development of its response to the McFadden commission recommendations on charity law reform. (S1O-6565)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): There was extensive consultation with the voluntary sector and other relevant interests prior to the Executive's response to the McFadden commission report, which was published on 16 December 2002. In taking forward our policy, we will continue to be open and responsive to the views of the charity sector.

Jackie Baillie: The minister will be aware of the Home Secretary's positive announcement that he will publish a draft charities bill that will provide a coherent framework for charity legislation in England and Wales. Does the minister agree that there is a need for early legislation on that matter? Does he also agree that the task of establishing a new regulator should progress hand in hand with the new bill? Will he make a commitment to a Scottish charities bill that is based on the McFadden commission's recommendations?

Mr Wallace: As much as I agree with Jackie Baillie, I do not entirely agree that we should hold up the establishment of the office of the Scottish charities regulator pending legislation. It is important that we get the office of the regulator off the ground as an executive agency as soon as we can. However, I accept that important work has been done south of the border and that the definition of charity work that was produced by the Cabinet Office strategy unit reflects other aspirations and bears the spirit of the McFadden recommendations. I will be writing to the Home Secretary to stress the importance, from a Scottish perspective, of the new modernised definition of a charity.

I do not think that it would be proper, so close to an election, to commit a future Administration to legislative plans.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): The voluntary sector is fearful that the spirit of the McFadden recommendations is being eroded by the delay since the first of four social justice ministers in this Executive announced the review of charity law, and since the second of the four announced that legislation would be introduced. Does the minister accept those concerns? Will he explain why the fundamental recommendation that there should be a charities act is being ignored, and why the pledge of a previous minister is being reversed?

Mr Wallace: I do not accept that the spirit of the McFadden recommendations has been eroded. Indeed, one of the McFadden commissioners was reported in *Third Force News* as saying that the Executive response was worth the wait. It is clear that we have accepted the thrust of the report, namely that there should be better regulation of charities in Scotland, and that we have responded positively to the majority of the McFadden recommendations. Legislation would be useful to introduce a new legal form for charities—the charitable incorporated organisation; to extend trustees' investment powers; to improve the procedures and powers of the charities' nominees; and perhaps to implement other measures to extend the regulatory powers available to the regulator. However, the point is that that bill was not envisaged for this parliamentary session, and while some legislation will be necessary, it would not be appropriate to give a time scale for it or to commit the next Administration to it.

Deprived Communities (Investment and Enterprise)

13. Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to sponsor investment and enterprise in deprived communities. (S1O-6573)

The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Iain Gray): Working with the United Kingdom Government, we have developed a range of initiatives, including investment incentives, to support businesses and other enterprises operating in disadvantaged communities. We are also investing £2 million a year over the next three years to stimulate the social economy, which provides valuable public services, particularly in the most deprived communities.

Ms Alexander: How many of the 20,000 modern apprenticeships already created and the 5,000 additional modern apprenticeships that the minister announced this week are likely to assist those living in our most hard-pressed communities? How important are modern apprenticeships in sustaining the strongest labour market that the country has had in 25 years?

Iain Gray: The modern apprenticeships are crucial in that regard. Although I cannot give a direct answer in numbers, I note that local enterprise companies have responsibility for modern apprenticeships and that enterprise networks have a strategic objective of closing the gap in unemployment between the worst 10 per cent of areas and the Scottish average. Modern apprenticeships are important in that regard as well.

As Wendy Alexander said, 20,000 modern apprenticeships have already been created and 5,000 additional ones are to come. I made it clear this week that I would like there to be 30,000 modern apprenticeships, as they are central to the maintenance of the historic low levels of unemployment in the country.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): How much money have the Scottish Executive and its agencies invested in the Paisley Partnership Regeneration Company and how much of that money has been lost or misspent as a result of the mismanagement of the company by the board, which is mainly made up of Labour people?

Iain Gray: I understand that Renfrewshire Council is compiling a report on the operation of the company. That report will be submitted to Communities Scotland, which will take any necessary action.

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): Would the minister concede that a much more convincing message would be sent to deprived communities if Scottish Enterprise were able to demonstrate that it had even a passing acquaintance with the condition of privation? Does he agree that, to achieve that, it would be sensible to direct a significant part of its budget to cut business rates and improve investment in transport infrastructure?

Iain Gray: The point, of course, is that around 50 per cent of Scottish Enterprise's budget is for investing in skills through modern apprenticeships, skillseekers and other training schemes. Investing in our people is the best way to give them the kind of future that we want. I understand that the Tories disagree with that. I think that that is unfortunate.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Before we come to First Minister's questions, I invite members to welcome two distinguished visitors—Mr Lehohla and Mr Lekhanya, the Deputy Prime Minister and Opposition leader from Lesotho. [*Applause.*]

First Minister's Question Time

15:10

Cabinet (Meetings)

1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S1F-2554)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): First of all, I welcome Winnie Ewing back to the Parliament for question time. She has been missed and we have all been thinking about her. [*Applause.*] I say to her that my invitation to her to visit Bute House before she finishes is still on.

Next week's Cabinet will discuss matters of importance.

Mr Swinney: I will be happy to extend the invitation to Dr Ewing to Bute House as well.

In 1999, the First Minister promised the people of Scotland that 80 per cent of children would

"reach the appropriate standard in reading ... by the time they leave primary school"

and that that target would be delivered within four years. This week, it was revealed that only 41 per cent of children in their final year of primary school had reached that standard. On 14 January, the First Minister said:

"I don't make promises I can't keep".

How can he reconcile that statement with his broken promise to the pupils and parents of Scotland?

The First Minister: This is becoming a bit like "Groundhog Day". Yet again, we have statistics from Mr Swinney that are totally distorted. The statistic that he quotes is one of a large number of a mixture of good and bad statistics in a report about 2001 relating to children who started their education in Scottish primary schools—indeed, some even in Scottish secondary schools—before the Parliament was created. By using statistics in that way, he distorts the facts about the hard work that is going on in Scottish primary schools and the various initiatives to improve reading, writing, listening, mathematics and arithmetic that make a real difference week in, week out in Scottish schools. Real improvements are taking place. Mr Swinney refuses to recognise that. He uses selective statistics in the Parliament week after week. In doing so today, he has done a disservice to Scottish teachers, just as last week he did to doctors and nurses.

Mr Swinney: The First Minister sounds rattled. Members should bear in mind the fact that he was the Minister for Education, Europe and External

Affairs at the time that the statistics relate to. I am talking about a promise that the Labour Government made in 1999 to ensure that 80 per cent of children reached a certain standard within four years. If its promises were not worth making four years ago, how on earth can we believe what the First Minister will say in the weeks to come?

Let us move on from reading to writing. The First Minister made a promise:

"80% of children to reach the appropriate standard in ... writing ... by the time they leave primary school."

However, the real figure is only 57 per cent in the final year of primary school. How can the First Minister reconcile saying

"I don't make promises I can't keep"

with his appalling record in improving the education system?

The First Minister: When Mr Swinney does not listen to the first answer, it is hard to respond to his pre-prepared second question. It is, of course, possible to come along week after week and quote selective statistics. It is also possible to do something about our education system, to take the right actions and to ensure that standards in our schools improve.

We said that we would improve standards in our schools in those basic necessities and that is exactly what we are doing. The fact that the statistics for 2001 do not show the results of that is patently obvious. Of course, if the statistics and performance in Scotland's schools are going to improve, that will take longer than two years for children who were already in school long before the Parliament was created.

Mr Swinney and Mr Russell did exactly the same thing a couple of months ago when the last set of education statistics came out. Those members were absolutely wrong. In reading, writing and mathematics, school results in Scotland had dramatically improved in secondary 2. We went from a percentage in the mid-40s in each of those categories to one in the 50s, which was a substantial improvement. That matters to each and every child whose education is improved. Mr Swinney should recognise that improvement, congratulate the teachers who have achieved it and support the parents of pupils who want it to happen.

Mr Swinney: I get accused week after week of using selective statistics, yet the statistics that I use week after week are those of the present, discredited Executive. The report to which the First Minister referred says that, between 1998 and 2001, average performance in primary 7 reading dropped 10 per cent at level D. Performance went down during the first two years of the Administration. If the First Minister wants to do

something about that, how about cutting class sizes in primaries 1, 2 and 3 and giving the kids a break? Is it not time that the First Minister started getting some good ideas from our side of the chamber before we get to his side and start implementing them?

The First Minister: Cutting class sizes is exactly what we did between 1999 and 2001, which is exactly why performance has been improving ever since. Every survey, every anecdote, every piece of evidence and every school visit that I undertake in Scotland shows that, where class sizes have been cut in primaries 1, 2 and 3, that has made a difference. That and the early-intervention programme have been boosting the opportunities to learn and the chances of children in our most deprived communities. When we go on and reduce class sizes in S1 and S2—in the early years of secondary school—that will do exactly the same thing again. The priority now for schools in Scotland is to improve attainment in the early years of secondary school when results drop off, when ambition declines and when children start to fail, and to give those children the chance that they deserve.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues he will raise. (S1F-2553)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I expect to meet the Prime Minister regularly over the coming weeks and I will discuss with him a wide range of issues.

David McLetchie: I am sure that the First Minister will. I noticed earlier today that the Scottish National Party was getting very exercised about the date of the budget. I am much more concerned about the content of the budget. I hope that the First Minister will try to persuade the Prime Minister to reverse the increase in national insurance contributions that will take effect in next month's budget. Not only will that increase hit working people, but, in essence, it is a tax on jobs. At a time when our growth rate in Scotland is a miserable 0.1 per cent per annum and the service sector in this country has just reported the worst monthly downturn since September 2001, does the First Minister agree that it would be in the best interests of the Scottish economy to scrap those damaging tax increases?

The First Minister: I am grateful to Mr McLetchie for raising the issue of the budget. I notice that Mr Swinney was not quite brave enough to do so, despite the fact that his party put out a press release this morning saying that, in 1995, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP had challenged the BBC on the scheduling of a

“Panorama” programme. Mr Jim Wallace and I remember trying to persuade the SNP to take part in the court action about that, but the SNP was frightened to stand up for Scotland and would not do it. A bit of honesty in the SNP would not go amiss—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Order. We are getting well wide of the question.

The First Minister: I am looking forward to the budget, whenever it takes place. Scotland is enjoying the lowest mortgage rates, the lowest interest rates, the lowest rate of unemployment and the lowest inflation in my adult life—since I was 15, none of those measures has been as low as it is today. The budget will be good for Scotland, good for the United Kingdom and good for growth.

David McLetchie: Scots are also paying what are probably the highest taxes in Mr McConnell's lifetime and there is no prospect of an abatement. *[Interruption.]* Oh, yes we are. The proportion of tax to gross national product is higher today than it was under the Conservative Government. We are not getting value for money in terms of the economy for all the taxes that we are paying.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): What about the Holyrood project?

David McLetchie: Do not get me started again on the Holyrood building—we shall leave that pleasure for another day. We all know that Mr Rumbles and his pals voted to waste £340 million on the Holyrood building. I am talking about other instances in which taxpayers in Scotland get poor value for money. Some £627 million of taxpayers' money is being spent on our enterprise budget and we are simply not seeing a return through higher growth or prosperity. I ask in all seriousness whether the First Minister has never thought to himself what Scottish businesses might have done with some of that money. Why will he not consider using the Parliament's powers to cut business rates so that we can find out what Scottish businesses can do?

The First Minister: That is another interesting subject. The Scottish Enterprise budget has been restricted this year and in years to come because we are reducing administration costs. We are delivering efficiencies inside that organisation. For clarity, I would like to put firmly on the record the fact that there is no divide between the Scottish Executive and Scottish Enterprise. The real divide in the chamber and in Scotland today is between the partnership parties, which support investment in training and skills and in business support in Scotland, and the Opposition parties, one of which would cut £150 million from that budget while the other would cut £250 million from it.

There is perhaps a secret agenda. Mr Murdo Fraser, who is a front-bench spokesperson for the self-same Conservative party, said last June:

“The only correct Tory conclusion is that Scottish Enterprise should be abolished.”

For the Conservatives, it is not good enough just to abolish the comprehensive education and health services of Scotland; they want to abolish Scottish Enterprise as well. Thank goodness they will never get the chance.

Illegal Firearms (Amnesty)

3. Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what impact the amnesty on illegal firearms will have on making communities safer. (S1F-2567)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Next month’s amnesty will play a vital part in our fight against gun crime. In the last amnesty, just under 4,000 weapons were surrendered in Scotland, along with 100,000 rounds of ammunition. Every firearm removed from illegal circulation is one less available to terrorise our communities.

Dr Jackson: As the First Minister knows, 23,000 firearms were handed over to police across the United Kingdom in the gun amnesty that followed the Dunblane tragedy. I hope that a similarly large number of deadly weapons will be handed over in the present amnesty. Will the First Minister assure me that the amnesty will be for illegal possession only and not for illegal use? Will he also assure me that any crimes that are found to have been carried out using the weapons that were handed in during the amnesty will be fully investigated?

The First Minister: Absolutely. The amnesty will apply solely to possession and will run for one month. Those who have an illegal gun will be able to bring it in, leave it and not be prosecuted. However, if there is evidence that they have ever used that gun, they will be prosecuted. The amnesty applies only to possession, not to use.

Scottish Enterprise

4. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether the performance of Scottish Enterprise is satisfactory. (S1F-2550)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I fully support the use of an arm’s-length organisation to deliver our enterprise strategy “A Smart, Successful Scotland”. The strategy must be delivered in an effective and efficient manner. I believe that Scottish Enterprise is best placed to do that and is taking the right steps to ensure that it is even more effective in the future.

Murdo Fraser: I am interested to hear the First Minister’s reply, because this week one minister

was quoted as saying that Scottish Enterprise is like

“an oil tanker running out of control”.

Where does the First Minister stand on the issue? Concern about the performance of Scottish Enterprise is not confined to the Conservative benches, but exists outside the Parliament—it is widespread in the business community. Will the First Minister back the call by my colleague Annabel Goldie for a wide-ranging, independent inquiry into Scottish Enterprise? If he and the Executive have nothing to hide, they have nothing to fear from such an inquiry.

The First Minister: I will make two straight, factual points. First, no minister made to any newspaper the comment that Murdo Fraser has cited. That will be confirmed in due course. Secondly, last Friday, Iain Gray and the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise said clearly that, if there are questions to answer about the way in which Scottish Enterprise does its business, Audit Scotland—which is able to audit the organisation’s books because of legislation that I put through the Parliament—will consider them and report in due course. That is the right course of action, not to distract Scottish Enterprise from its vital job of creating growth and jobs in Scotland, but to ensure that, where allegations are made, they are investigated quickly and properly so that Scottish Enterprise can get on with its business and deliver for Scotland.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I am pleased to hear the First Minister express his confidence in the Scottish Enterprise network. Does he agree that too many areas of Scotland, such as my area of Greenock and Inverclyde, have long-standing above-average levels of unemployment and low levels of economic activity? Does he agree that that requires a cross-cutting, co-ordinated approach from the Executive? Will he meet me to discuss how we can address those issues in my constituency?

The First Minister: Yes, of course I will be happy to meet Duncan McNeil to discuss those matters. They are critical in the Greenock and Inverclyde area, as they are in other parts of Scotland. I am aware of the economic pressures in that area and I am determined to see a range of public agencies providing full support to ensure that the sort of economic success that the area has enjoyed, despite difficult times, in the past 30 years can be repeated over the next 30 years.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): In relation to the article on Scottish Enterprise in *The Scotsman* last Friday, does the First Minister know who wrote the memo? Does he know who leaked the memo? If he finds out that it was written or

leaked from within the Executive, will he sack the person responsible? Does he agree with me, the Confederation of British Industry Scotland and other sections of the business community that the campaign that *The Scotsman* has led for the past week to undermine the work of Scottish Enterprise is damaging not only to Scottish Enterprise, but to Scotland?

The First Minister: I have made my position on the matter quite clear. I do not know who wrote any memo; I have not seen any memo. To deflect the attention of our enterprise company at this stage to go searching for memos or for who might or might not have them would be a shame. If issues around that come out in due course, I am sure that they will be tackled by the right people at the right time. Mr Neil, who I understand is a passionate advocate of training and skills in this country, has to answer the question that I asked him in the chamber some weeks ago: why does his party support a cut of £150 million from a £480 million enterprise budget, given that such a cut would result in a reduction in training and skills, business support and the promotion of Scotland overseas? Is that really what he supports or is he simply keeping quiet for his party at election time?

The Presiding Officer: Order. This is not Mr Neil's question time.

Immigration

5. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Executive is taking to attract more immigrants who can contribute to growth and development to Scotland. (S1F-2568)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We believe that for a growing Scottish economy we need a growing Scottish population. That means that we must retain talent that is already here in Scotland. We also need to attract back Scots who have moved away and we must be ready to welcome fresh talent from elsewhere. As a start, we are improving our image abroad to promote Scotland as an attractive place in which to live and work. We are working with the Home Office to promote Scotland as a destination for people applying for United Kingdom work permits. We will also work with non-Scottish students domiciled here to encourage them to stay in Scotland after they have graduated from our universities and colleges.

Donald Gorrie: I thank the First Minister for that helpful reply. Will he talk to ministers in London whose rules prevent asylum seekers from working for a long time even if they have useful skills? That is another pool of labour that we could tap and I hope that he will pursue the matter.

The First Minister: We have rightly been

careful in the chamber not to encroach on the reserved responsibilities of the UK Government in relation to asylum seekers and refugees. Where asylum seekers or genuine refugees based in Scotland have been allowed to stay in the United Kingdom, we have done all that we can to ensure proper integration into local communities, which has been the right thing to do in those cases.

I stress that what I said today and what I said last week were not directed at asylum seekers. What I said was directed at a wide range of people, such as Scots who might want to move away, Scots who have already moved away but could come back and the many others from Europe, North America and elsewhere in the world who want to come to Scotland to live and work because this country is a good place to be. We have had an incredible response. There have been dozens of e-mails, letters and calls to the Executive and British embassies around the world. We will take those inquiries up and ensure that, in the future, Scotland's economy grows as a result of those skills.

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Does the First Minister accept that part of the process of attracting immigrants will involve recognising and valuing diversity in Scotland? That task will include the need to value and to invest in a highly skilled work force. Does he agree that excising Scottish Enterprise's skills budget is something that Scotland needs like a hole in the head?

The First Minister: It would be safe for me to agree with that.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): The First Minister said that we would attract people from outwith Scotland. He mentioned that the British embassies had been responsive to that message. Will he say whether we will have people on the ground or whether the process will be done entirely through information technology? I would like him to take on board my suggestion that, if we cannot have commercial embassies inside the British embassies, we should have welcome-to-Scotland desks.

The First Minister: I am eager to promote the policy in every imaginative way possible. We need to do that elsewhere in the world and here in the United Kingdom. Those who are already in the country and those who would come here should be told about the attractions of living and working in Scotland. If that means competing with other parts of the United Kingdom, I would be happy to stand up for Scotland on that basis.

Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): A-nis, tha sinn a' gluasad gu deasbad na Gàidhlig.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

We now move to the debate on Gaelic.

The member continued in English.

The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-3618, in the name of Michael Russell, on the general principles of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill. I remind members that sections of the debate will be conducted in Gaelic. Non-Gaelic speakers can obtain translation by using their headsets, which should be tuned to channel 1.

The member continued in Gaelic.

Tha mi a' gairm Mhicheil Ruiseal gus an deasbad fhosgladh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I call Michael Russell to open the debate.

15:33

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Tha an deasbad seo an-diugh a' comharrachadh na darna oidhirp reachdail gus Beurla agus Gàidhlig a chur air stèidh cho-ionann ann an sùilean lagha na h-Alba. Chaidh a' chiad oidhirp a dhèanamh le Dòmhnall Stiùbhart, ball Pàrlamaid airson nan Eilean Siar, ann an Taigh nan Cumantan anns an Fhaoilleach 1981. Chaidh taic a thoirt dhan bhile aige le, am measg dhaoine eile, Dennis Canavan. Ann an aithisg *Hansard* airson an deasbaid, bha òraidean làidir ann a bha a' toirt taic do "inbhe laghail" dhan Ghàidhlig, mar a bha againn air aig an àm, bho iomadh ball Pàrlamaid thar nam pàrtaidhean, a' gabhail a-staigh òraid chumhachdach bho Sheòras Robastan.

Ged a bha cruaidh fheum air an reachdas seo ann an 1981, tha tòrr a bharrachd feum air a-nis. Tha àireamh luchd labhairt na Gàidhlig fhathast a' crìonadh, le nas lugha na 60,000 duine ann a-nis le coimeas conaltraidh anns a' chànan. Ged a tha na figearan as ùire bhon chunntas sluaigh air nochdadh gu bheil barrachd dealais is barrachd ùidh ann anns a' Ghàidhlig am measg na h-òigridh agus am measg na feadhna nach eil a' fuireach ann an cridhe na Gaidhealtachd, is e firinn na cùise gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig a' gluasad nas fhaisge agus nas fhaisge air a' bhàs.

Agus cha bu chòir teagamh sam bith a bhith air duine mun bhàs a tha sin. Bidh cànan a' bàsachadh àiteigin air an t-saoghal gach cola-deug. B' urrainn dhan Ghàidhlig bàsachadh mar

na cànanan eile sin. Bàsaichidh i mura bi oidhirp daingean ann gus a cumail beò.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Today's debate marks the second attempt to put the English and Gaelic languages on an equal footing in the eyes of the law of Scotland. The late Donald Stewart, who was member of Parliament for the Western Isles, made the first attempt in the House of Commons in January 1981 and among the supporters of his bill was Dennis Canavan. The *Hansard* report of the debate contains strong speeches in favour of what was then called "legal status" for Gaelic by a number of MPs from across the parties, including a particularly impressive speech by George Robertson. The legislation was much needed in 1981, but it is needed even more now. The number of Gaelic speakers has continued to decline; fewer than 60,000 people in Scotland are able to communicate in the language.

Although the most recent census figures show an increasing commitment to, and interest in, Gaelic from the young people and those who do not live in its heartlands, the reality of the situation is that Gaelic is moving ever closer to extinction—let no one be in any doubt about the possibility of that extinction. Every fortnight, a language dies somewhere in the world and Gaelic could die just like all those languages. It will die unless there is a determined attempt to keep it alive.

The member continued in English.

There are more than 6,000 languages in the world and perhaps as many as 90 per cent of those languages are at risk. Somewhere in the world a language dies every fortnight. Gaelic can die just like all those other languages and it will die unless we do everything that we can—this afternoon "we" means each one of us in this chamber—to keep it alive.

The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill, which I introduced on 13 November, seeks to give the Gaelic language the secure status that it needs so that it can begin to overcome generations of neglect and even hostility and to give it the chance, to be frank, to survive. Mine is a modest bill that has limited scope. It will lay on a number of public bodies within a defined geographical area—that area could be expanded by statutory instrument—a duty to prepare and implement Gaelic language plans. It also specifies a limited name-and-shame sanction against those that do not.

The bill's inspiration lies in a number of reports and consultations on Gaelic, some of which were commissioned by the Executive. For example, the report of the ministerial advisory group on Gaelic, which was delivered to the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport in March last year, had as its first recommendation:

“That immediate action is taken to develop and implement a Gaelic Language Act to establish secure status for the language. The creation of such an Act is seen as vital by the Gaelic community ... in establishing community confidence and in securing the future prosperity of the language.”

The detailed proposals of the bill mirror closely some of the provisions of the Welsh Language Act 1993. Indeed, the definition of secure status is drawn from that act. The bill is also close to some of the ideas in the report on secure status that was drawn up by Comunn na Gàidhlig in 1997.

Secure status has been the aim of those who are involved in, and who have worked for, the Gaelic language for many years. I acknowledge freely that secure status—the recognition in law of the need to treat Gaelic and English equally—is not the only strategic tool with which to start to rebuild the language. It is clear that family transmission in the home, education—Gaelic-medium education and the teaching of Gaelic as a second language—broadcasting, in particular radio, publishing, the arts, and the use of Gaelic in commerce are all vital, but secure status would underpin all those other actions.

Secure status would be both symbolic and practical in its effect. It would be symbolic because the passage of the bill in this parliamentary session—which is still possible, despite what others say—would tell this nation and the world that Scotland cares about its culture and that it will work to save the parts of that culture that are endangered. The bill’s passage would be practical because the bill takes the first steps towards ensuring that Gaelic is recognised by public bodies, and towards making certain that its use is at least thought about, planned for and made possible by those bodies.

Secure status can and should go further. It should provide a legal right to Gaelic-medium education and it should be introduced into other areas of life, including—this is important—business and commerce. Secure status should have an influence on the media and the Parliament, but those things will have to wait because they are outwith the scope of the bill. However, a member’s bill can start the process.

We should remember that secure status as I have expressed it was the policy—and apparently still is the policy—not only of the SNP, but of the Executive parties. Legislation to establish secure status was promised by the Executive parties and by the SNP prior to the 1999 elections. Since then, as the minister and his predecessor know, I have consistently offered my support for the introduction and passage of such a bill. Indeed, as an incentive for movement, I lodged a proposal for such a bill three years ago, but during all that time I have continued in private and public discussion with the

key players, because so many want the bill to succeed.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I acknowledge the member’s commitment—which he has shown from the beginning of this Parliament—to the protection of the Gaelic language.

I represent a constituency in Glasgow that has a large number of Gaelic speakers, who are mainly concentrated in Partick. If Parliament agrees to the general principles of the bill today, how will it help my constituents in Glasgow who wish to protect the Gaelic language? Will it assist them?

Michael Russell: I think that it will assist them. I accept the point that Pauline McNeill makes and I will say something specifically about Glasgow later in my speech.

The Executive’s failure to bring forward a plan for a bill—finally shown in its reaction to the MAGOG report—made it painfully clear that the only way forward in the first parliamentary session of the first Scottish Parliament in 300 years would be to introduce a member’s bill. Much has been made, including by the minister, of the supposed “lateness” of the bill. I admit that it is late; secure status is at least two generations late. We can, however, achieve secure status and we can achieve it now.

I am grateful to all those who have helped with the bill: to my co-sponsor John Farquhar Munro; to the many organisations that gave evidence at various stages; to the individuals who advised and discussed the proposals; to the non-Executive bills unit under its leader David Cullum, whom I drove almost mad; to the Gaelic officers of the Parliament, Alasdair MacCaluim and his predecessor Ailig O’Henley; and to the members of the cross-party group on Gaelic. I am especially grateful to the members and clerks of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, who undertook thorough and detailed scrutiny of the bill over no less than five evidence-taking sessions. The committee’s report is valuable and well informed and it makes many positive suggested amendments.

I turn to the question of amendments. I have said repeatedly that I am open to anything that can make the bill better. I have also made it clear that getting on the statute book legislation that says, as the bill says, that

“the Gaelic and English languages should be treated on a basis of equality”

is a prize for which it is worth compromising.

The evidence to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee shows that there are two main areas of concern. First, there is a strong feeling that the bill should apply, from the start, to the

whole of Scotland. I still feel that there are practical reasons for doing things in the way that is set out in the bill. Pauline McNeill made an important point and I accept that the application of the approach that is set out in the bill, particularly in the case of Glasgow, but also in other areas, could create anomalies and difficulties. I am open to the committee's suggestion that further evidence should be taken and that there should be amendments to the bill that would widen its scope. That said, a concomitant change to the bill would have to be made to allow for variation in language plans in different parts of the country. That happens in Wales, as Mr Jenkins and other members know from the evidence that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee heard at stage 1.

I turn to implementation. Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba, in its strong support for the bill—for which I am very grateful—said that it wishes to be deeply involved in the process. In the past, the minister has indicated that one of his objections to the bill is that it does not mention that board. Of course the minister knows that the bill cannot mention the board because the board has not yet been established in statute. If the minister establishes the board in statute, everybody—I repeat, everybody—would be delighted to have the board involved. Only the minister can establish the board in statute.

With fewer than 60,000 speakers, Gaelic is now in the intensive care ward of the world's languages; it needs urgent attention. I acknowledge the Scottish Executive's, and the minister's, commitment to Gaelic and I applaud the establishment of the board. All of us, however, admit that those actions are nowhere near enough. We need more opportunities for learning Gaelic, more work on Gaelic in the home, more emphasis on radio and more promotion of the importance of Gaelic.

What is needed, most of all, is determination and political will. Determination and political will have brought other languages in the world back from the edge of the grave, so it can be done, because it has been done elsewhere with great success. Gaelic is not, as some would have us believe, ill suited to the modern world. It is no better or worse as a means of communication and as a world view than English or any other language. Gaelic has been, as all the threatened languages of the world are, a victim of economics and politics, but economics and politics could breathe new life back into it. The passage of the bill through its first stage today would be an expression of the determination and political will of the Parliament and of a new Scotland to work to do precisely that—to bring the language back to life.

Conversely, rejection of the bill would tell the Gaelic community and the world that, in this “three voiced nation”—as it is called by the Gaelic poet Iain Crichton Smith in words that Tom Fleming read in the chamber on the Parliament's opening day—we are still not prepared to take all the necessary and increasingly urgent steps that are required to preserve and protect a unique part of our culture and our national life, one for which we alone have the responsibility.

Presiding Officer, I have the honour to move the first ever legislative motion in Gaelic in the Scottish Parliament and probably in our country's history.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill.

The member continued in Gaelic.

Agus, anns a' Ghàidhlig,

Gu bheil a' Phàrlamaid a' toirt taic do phrionnsabalan coitcheann Bile Cànan na Gàidhlig (Alba).

15:45

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mike Watson): I want to thank the Education, Culture and Sport Committee for the time that it has set aside to consider in depth the issues that have been raised by Michael Russell's Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill. I congratulate the committee on the thoroughness of its evidence taking and the clarity of its report.

It is fair to say that our wider programme of support for Gaelic provides the background and context for the Executive's consideration of the bill and its principles. Its record on Gaelic since 1999 means that the language is now available at all levels of education and with improved resources and materials. In Gaelic-medium education, numbers of pupils and units are increasing, attainment levels are high and—crucially—we are training more teachers year on year.

The evidence that was submitted to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee has been thoughtful and informed and I note that there was a considerable overlap between the concerns that I raised in my evidence and the conclusions that the committee reached in its report. In particular, the committee saw the merit of the Executive's argument that there is no need for a reference to the ombudsman in the bill and that, once amended, the bill

“could dovetail into the work of the Executive and of Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba”.

I want to summarise our continuing concerns about the bill. The Executive considers language planning to be important. Indeed, that is self-

evident, given that we have established Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba for that purpose at national level, and we have encouraged public bodies to adopt a positive approach. However, any such planning should be based on promoting Gaelic language and culture and facilitating its development, not on a stipulation that English and Gaelic must have equal status in every part of Scotland. We cannot accept that provision as part of the bill, although we should not ignore the fact that there is considerable Gaelic developmental activity outside the areas that are listed in the bill.

We note the committee's comments in paragraph 44 of the report on the duty to prepare language plans that apply to the whole of Scotland. That is one of our areas of concern, so we welcome the fact that the committee will take further evidence on that important point.

We must balance the placing of a general duty on all public bodies to prepare Gaelic development plans with a recognition that what is appropriate in areas in which there are considerable numbers of Gaelic speakers will differ significantly from what is appropriate in areas in which Gaelic speakers are few. Merely to apply the tests that the bill sets of what is "appropriate and reasonably practical" would be insufficient. Any provision would need to take particular account of the numbers of speakers in an area and of demonstrable demand.

The committee also expressed uncertainty about the financial memorandum that was submitted, so further consideration of that important issue is also required. The matter is of considerable significance to the Executive; indeed, it would be more significant if the bill's provisions were to be extended beyond the areas that are specified in it. I speak from experience when I say that members who introduce legislative proposals should have them appropriately costed and that any projected costs should be updated as appropriate during consideration of the bill. [*Interruption.*] Mr Monteith might laugh; however, that is what happened during the passage of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002.

It is not sufficient merely to provide the minimal information that Mr Russell has provided in the bill's financial memorandum at introduction. It is wrong to create legislation that would impose unquantified demands on public bodies, which is why I wrote to Michael Russell asking him for the additional information that is necessary to assist the Executive in drawing up a financial resolution. He has written back to me saying that it is up to the Executive to come up with that information; however, that is really not the case, and his response shows that he really misunderstands the procedure behind member's bills.

Michael Russell: I am happy to provide the letter for the Parliament's consideration. I should point out that it does not say what Mike Watson

suggested. Rather, it makes three comments: first, it points out that the minister is the former convener of the Finance Committee and is no slouch at criticising financial resolutions, although the Executive has often been found wanting in that regard; it has been difficult to assess certain aspects of legislation. Indeed, the Education (Graduate Endowment and Student Support) (Scotland) Bill had those problems.

Secondly, as the minister knows, it is necessary for a financial resolution to be in place before stage 2 starts. However, any such resolution must reflect the bill as introduced. The bill has not yet been amended and I cannot guess what the amendments will be. If it were amended, work would have to be done on amending the financial resolution.

Thirdly, if officials of the Parliament and the Executive have views about the costs, the proper and sensible thing for them to do is to meet and talk about such matters. However, I have also said that it would delay stage 2 if the financial resolution were not approved, so it should be approved now.

Mike Watson: Surely that was one of the longest interventions in this session of the Parliament.

Michael Russell: I was correcting an error.

Mike Watson: I have the member's letter here, but I do not propose to quote from it.

It is incumbent on any member who is introducing a bill to provide information on the possible costs, even if those costs are not quantifiable. We have a reasonable right to expect to see the best-case and worst-case scenarios. Members cannot expect the Executive or the Minister for Finance and Public Services to sign up to an open-ended agreement and write a blank cheque. I was suggesting that Mr Russell should come up with more details, even if they are just within certain parameters. He cannot expect us to rely on the initial information that was submitted when the bill was introduced.

I have also noted that the committee recommended that the Executive should consider establishing Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba on a statutory basis. I should correct something that Mr Russell said in his opening remarks; I did not give evidence to the committee that one of the problems was that the bill did not mention the question of Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba. When I gave evidence on 21 January, Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba had not yet had an opportunity to consider the bill because it had held its inaugural meeting only four days prior to that. That was my point.

Although giving Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba legal status might be considered at a later date, we are

advised that trying to do that through the bill as drafted could be outwith the general principles of the bill.

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands)

(SNP): Has Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba now met and has it reached a view on whether it is in favour of the bill?

Mike Watson: As is well and publicly recorded, Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba considered the bill and is generally supportive of it, but believes that the bill should be amended to cover all Scotland, and that it should create legal status for Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba as a non-departmental public body. Of course, the board is already a non-departmental public body and is functioning effectively across the full range of its responsibilities, as it has done since it was formed in January.

The Executive agrees that the geographical scope of the bill, as well as the other matters of concern to which I have referred, including the likely burden on public bodies, requires further consideration. For that reason, I welcome the fact that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee intends to reconsider those issues in special meetings later this month.

We believe that the bill as it stands has significant shortcomings, which are reflected in the committee's views and recommendations. In view of the committee's intention to take further evidence on important aspects of the bill before it proceeds, I am pleased to signify that the Executive will support the motion, which will allow that to happen.

15:53

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP):

It is with pleasure that I speak in support of Michael Russell's Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill.

The Gaelic language is in an extremely precarious position. That fact was confirmed—although we did not need it to be—by the recent census figures. The policy memorandum for the bill pre-empted that bleak assessment by stating that

“The use of the Gaelic language has been shown to be declining”.

That is why the bill's stated aim is to stop that decline by taking the first steps towards making Gaelic a normal part of everyday life in Scotland and, at the same time, reminding many Scots of its existence.

Virtually the entire Gaelic community wants the bill to be passed and has said so. However, it is not just Gaelic speakers who care about Gaelic and who do not want to contemplate what Scotland might be like without it. Many people who are not Gaelic speakers support the bill's aims

because they empathise with the language and culture. They understand that support for language use is needed in order to ensure that people can retain their sense of identity. The continuing vitality of our heritage languages is important not only for the communities who speak them; it enriches our entire society.

Let us be clear what the bill is about. It is not about bilingual road signs appearing all over the place and it will not require translation of every single document in public use. It will not require simultaneous translation—such as we are using today in the chamber—to be available everywhere we go. The purpose of the bill is to place a duty on certain public bodies to prepare, publish and implement a Gaelic language plan. When those bodies prepare such plans, they are to give effect to the principle that Gaelic and English will be treated on a basis of equality in exercising their functions. The principle that Gaelic and English should operate on a basis of equality is important and sends out a strong message about the language's intrinsic worth.

Most of the evidence that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee received supported the view that Gaelic needs to be promoted and secured to survive, and most witnesses supported the bill. The findings mirrored those of consultations that were undertaken by Comunn na Gàidhlig and for the Macpherson and Meek reports, which showed the desire for a bill on the Gaelic language.

In his evidence to the committee, the minister confirmed that the Executive's commitments include working towards secure status for Gaelic, and that he wants to increase the number of trainee teachers in order to provide a future for the language. The Executive's approach and the bill are not mutually exclusive—supporters and even the proposer of the bill acknowledge that the bill is just the start of a necessary process.

Overwhelmingly, evidence suggested—the committee agreed—that the bill should be extended to apply to all public bodies throughout Scotland, to avoid potential division in the Gaelic community. The committee's report identified options to deal with the undoubted practical difficulties that would arise from that.

We could do worse than taking our lead from the Welsh Language Board, which told the committee that its language schemes were developed as authorities arrived at positions from which they could implement the schemes. That board made it clear that every language scheme would differ from the schemes before or after it and would reflect where the body involved operated. If we were to follow that principle, the bill would require public bodies to produce a Gaelic policy according to the strength of the language in the areas that they serve.

The committee recognises that enforcement of the plans or schemes needs to be re-examined, but acknowledges that that relates to the role of Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba. The committee supports the overwhelming view from evidence that the board should be established formally in legislation and that its roles and responsibilities should be defined clearly.

The passage of the first Gaelic language bill in the first Scottish Parliament for 300 years would be of huge symbolic value and would start the practical process of stabilising and rebuilding the Gaelic language. What could be more appropriate than the first Scottish Parliament in 300 years adopting a law to improve the status of Gaelic? Gaelic is a living entity and, like other living entities, it needs support and care. It is heartening that the argument has moved on from being about the merits or otherwise of supporting the language to how that can best be done. Gaelic can best be supported through legislation.

Supporting the bill at stage 1 would be a magnificent gesture on the part of all MSPs, but it would be more than a gesture to support the bill, with amendments, at stages 2 and 3 in order to help to secure the future of Gaelic as a viable language. I ask members to support the bill. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. I say gently that we do not allow applause from the public gallery, because we might also have abuse or be shouted at from there, as happened the other day.

15:58

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the bill and congratulate Michael Russell on introducing it. I am aware of the hard work that he put into it over a long time. I hope that he will forgive me for saying that the proposal is modest but nonetheless worthy. It will take Gaelic a step forward. A more comprehensive bill that sought to address secure status more fully would have been welcome, but I appreciate the difficulties that producing a member's bill on a larger scale presents. The bill is at least a step in the right direction.

I am proud of the record of previous Conservative Governments on supporting Gaelic. During our time in office, we passed several relevant pieces of legislation, such as the British Nationality Act 1981, which specified that knowledge of Gaelic would satisfy the language conditions for naturalisation; the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, which placed a duty on education authorities to provide for Gaelic teaching in Gaelic-speaking areas; the Grants for Gaelic Language Education (Scotland)

Regulations 1986, which provided a scheme of specific grants for Gaelic education; the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985, which allowed for financial support to organisations to promote the Gaelic language and its culture; and the Broadcasting Acts of 1990 and 1996, which placed a duty on the Secretary of State for Scotland to make payments for a Gaelic broadcasting fund. In 1979, under a Labour Government, there was no funding for education or broadcasting. The only sum that was available for Gaelic was a grant of just over £60,000 that was given to An Comunn Gaidhealach. By 1997, public support for Gaelic had increased to more than £12.5 million.

I would like to outline briefly current Conservative thinking on Gaelic. Governments cannot make people speak Gaelic or create a demand where none exists. However, Governments can and should respond to demand that exists and create an environment in which those who wish to learn, speak and conduct their affairs in Gaelic have the opportunity to do so.

In recent years, there has been a welcome resurgence of interest in Gaelic, particularly among the young. However, that has not always been matched by Government support. For example, there is a growing demand for Gaelic-medium education, but local authorities have sometimes been slow to respond to that demand, which has hampered the development of the language. Conservative members have previously made the point—and I do so again—that we must empower parents and give them real rights to Gaelic-medium education for their children. There should be a right, subject to demand, to establish their own Gaelic-medium schools with direct state funding.

I would like to make a few points about the specifics of the bill. I would have liked to have seen a specific reference to Gaelic-medium education in the bill, but I appreciate that that might be outwith its scope. I am concerned that the bill extends only to certain parts of Scotland. Much of the new interest in Gaelic comes not from the traditional Gaelic-speaking areas, but from our cities—Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth and Aberdeen. In many ways, the future of the language is in those areas, so why should they be excluded from the bill's ambit?

On section 1(3), I question whether it is realistic to say that

"the Gaelic and English languages should be treated on a basis of equality."

I appreciate that that is a fundamental point for Michael Russell, but I am aware that even some activists in the Gaelic community do not consider that objective to be achievable. We need assurances about exactly what impact such

proposals would have if they were to be implemented. I have no doubt that if the bill progresses—and I trust that it will—such points can be addressed at stage 2.

Opponents of public support for Gaelic sometimes use the argument that nowadays more people in Scotland speak Urdu or Punjabi than Gaelic. Even if that is true, it misses the point. Gaelic is a unique part of our Scottish heritage and that brings an obligation on us to try to preserve and strengthen it. There are millions of Urdu and Punjabi speakers elsewhere in the world and even if those languages were to die out in Scotland—which I do not advocate—they would survive and prosper elsewhere. Gaelic is our responsibility and ours alone.

Why should we encourage Gaelic? Why should we not just let it die? Whether or not we speak Gaelic and whether or not we know people who speak it, it is one thread in the complex tapestry that gives us our Scottish identity. If we lose Gaelic, we will all be diminished, whether we are Gaels or not.

The bill will not be the salvation of Gaelic, but it is a small step in the right direction and will therefore receive Conservative support. I am pleased to hear that it will have Executive support. I trust that such support is not just a token, but that the Executive will ensure that the bill will complete its passage through the Parliament before the end of March. Michael Watson's speech was a little mean-spirited and nit-picking, but I hope that he is genuine in his support for the bill.

In this historic first session of the Scottish Parliament, we have an opportunity to pass a bill that will benefit our ancient Scottish language. I hope that we will do so in order that future generations of Scots—whether or not they are Gaelic speaking—will look back on today as a day that made a difference.

16:04

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): Tha mi a' cur fàilte air a h-uile duine dhan deasbad shònraichte seo mu dheidhinn Gàidhlig. Cha leig mi leis innse do dhuine sam bith an seo, gu bheil àite glè shònraichte aig Gàidhlig ann an cridhe agus ann an anam ar nàisein phròiseil. Bha Gàidhlig air a bruidhinn tron eachdraidh sgrìobhte againn agus tha an dualchas cultarach beartach aice air cuideachadh ann a bhith a' cruthachadh inbhe nàiseanta ar dùthcha san latha an-diugh, a dh'aindeoin nam buaidh de linn-tean de leth-bhreith agus a dh'aindeoin a' chrìonaidh a thachair mar thoradh air a sin.

Annas na beagan bhliadhnaichean mu dheireadh, tha Gàidhlig air ath-bheothachadh ann an dòigh a tha glè bhrosnachail. Tha seo air a bhith

follaiseach bho thaic làidir nam pàrantan airson a' chànan agus airson a' chultair, a tha a' ciallachadh gu bheil na h-àireamhan de chloinn ann am foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig a' leudachadh. Bu chòir dhuinn a bhith a' coimhead air seo mar fhear de na prìomh amasan againn agus bu chòir dhuinn a bhith a' coimhead air foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig mar shiostam coileanta bhon sgoil àraich gu foghlam aig an treas ìre.

Gus an neart cudthromach seo a chumail a' dol, feumaidh sinn dèanamh cinnteach nach eil Gàidhlig a' crochadh air deagh rùn poileataigeach agus a bhith so-leònte ma bhios atharrachaidhean poileataigeach agus riaghlach ann—rud nach bi a' brosnachadh chosnaidhean tèarainte airson luchd-teagaisg.

Feumaidh aire shònraichte a bhith air a toirt air trèanadh luchd-teagaisg. Tha dìth luchd-teagaisg airson foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig gu h-àraid a' cur bacadh air astar an leasachaidh. Feumaidh cothrom a bhith ann eadar iarrtas agus solar cho luath 's a ghabhas. Feumaidh colaistean agus oilthighean a bhith air am brosnachadh agus feumaidh taic a bhith aca ann a bhith a' cruthachadh chùrsaichean mac-meanmnach agus ann a bhith a' leasachadh a' churraicealaim ann an dòigh a tha a' coileanadh feuman luchd-teagaisg na Gàidhlig.

Tha adhartas ann an leasachadh na Gàidhlig air a bhith cho slaodach 's a ghabhas agus tha e mar gu bheil na bacaidhean a tha gan cur oirn a' fàs nas àirde gach ceum a ghabhas sinn air an t-slighe. Mar eisimpleir, ann an 1980, chaidh buidheann obrach Gàidhlig a stèidheachadh le Bòrd Leasachaidh na Gaidhealtachd is nan Eilean gus ro-innleachd a mholadh airson na Gàidhlig. Ann an 1982, mhol a' bhuidheann dhan Riaghaltas gum bu chòir bòrd Gàidhlig a bhith air a stèidheachadh gus comhairle a thoirt dhaibh air cùisean Gàidhlig. A dh'aindeoin sin, cha do ghabh an Riaghaltas ris a seo.

Thuir Seòras Younger nach maireann, aig colabhairt Ghàidhlig aig Sabhal Mòr Ostaig ann an 1986, nach maireadh a' Ghàidhlig beò tro reachdas bhon Riaghaltas. Mairidh i a-mhàin, thuir e, ma tha daoine airson 's gum mair i beò. Ach ma chuireas coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig na prionnsabalan aca an cèill mu dheidhinn na Gàidhlig, feumaidh an Riaghaltas an uair sin a bhith a' freagairt le taic reachdail.

Tha sinn a-nis an seo às dèidh cha mhòr 20 bliadhna is sinn fhathast a' feitheamh gu foighidneach airson taic reachdail. Chan eil teagamh sam bith ann mu dhòchasan nan coimhearsnachdan Gàidhlig. Rinn iad sin follaiseach. Tha ùidh mhòr agus taic mhòr bhuapa agus tha iad air togail fhaighinn a chionn 's gu bheil Riaghaltas na h-Alba air Bòrd na Gàidhlig a

stèidheachadh gus leasachadh na Gàidhlig a bhrosnachadh agus a stiùireadh.

An-diugh, ma-thà, tha cothrom againn mu dheireadh thall a bhith a' toirt taic do Bhile Cànan na Gàidhlig (Alba). Ma thèid aontachadh ris a' bhile, bidh seo a' comharrachadh latha ùr airson na Gàidhlig agus bheireadh e togail do na coimhearsnachdan Gàidhlig. Chan eil teagamh air sin. Chan eil am bile a' sparradh Gàidhlig air duine sam bith far nach eil iad ga h-iarraidh. B' urrainn do na crìochan a tha gam moladh anns a' bhile a bhith gan atharrachadh aig ìre 2 no ìre 3. Mar sin, tha mi ag iarraidh air na buill uile an taic a thoirt dhan bhile. Chan urrainn dhuinn fuireach fad 20 bliadhna eile mus bi reachdas ann. Tha cothrom againn an-diugh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I welcome everybody to this special debate on Gaelic. I do not have to tell anyone here that Gaelic has a special place in the heart and soul of a proud nation. Gaelic was spoken throughout our recorded history and its rich cultural heritage helps to create the national identity of this country today. Despite the effect of centuries of discrimination and despite the decrease in the numbers because of that, in the past few years Gaelic has seen an encouraging revitalisation.

That revitalisation has been obvious through the strong support of parents for the language and the culture, which has resulted in an increase in the number of children who go through Gaelic-medium education. We should see that as one of our main aims. We should see Gaelic-medium education as a complete system from nursery education to tertiary education. To maintain the momentum, we must ensure that Gaelic does not rely on political good will and is not vulnerable to political and legislative changes, which would not encourage secure employment for teachers.

We need special recognition for teacher training. The shortage of teachers for Gaelic-medium education is holding back the rate of development. We need to achieve a balance as soon as possible between demand and provision. Colleges and universities must be encouraged and supported in creating imaginative courses and in developing the curriculum in a way that meets the needs of Gaelic-medium teachers.

The progress in Gaelic development has been slow. The hurdles seem to become higher and higher with every step that we take on the road. In 1980, a Gaelic working group was established by the Highlands and Islands Development Board to recommend a strategy for Gaelic and, in 1982, the group recommended to the Government that a Gaelic board be established to advise it on Gaelic matters. The Government did not take up that recommendation.

At a Gaelic conference at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in 1986, the late George Younger said that Gaelic would not survive through Government legislation; it would survive only if people desired it. He said that, if the Gaelic community implemented its principles with regard to Gaelic, the Government would then have to respond with legislative support.

Twenty years later, we are still patiently awaiting that legislative support. There is no doubt about the hopes of the Gaelic community, as it has made those clear. There is great interest in Gaelic and great support for it. The Gaelic community has been given a boost by the establishment by the Executive of Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba to direct the development and promotion of Gaelic.

Today, at long last, we have an opportunity to support a Gaelic language bill. If the bill is accepted and agreed, it will mark a new day for Gaelic and it will without doubt boost the Gaelic communities. The bill will not force Gaelic on anybody. The boundaries that are recommended within the bill could be altered at stage 2 or stage 3. I urge all members to support the bill. We cannot afford to wait a further 20 years for legal status. We have an opportunity today.

16:09

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): Anns na ceithir bliadhnaichean a chaidh seachad, tha sinn air adhartas fhaicinn ann an iomadach roinn co-cheangailte ris a' Ghàidhlig. Chaidh rudan a dhèanamh chan ann a-mhàin leis an Riaghaltas agus a' Phàrlamaid seo, ach tha ar caraidean ann an Westminster a' dèanamh an t-uabhas obrach cuideachd. Tha ball Pàrlamaid Calum Dòmhnallach a' strì agus a' coiteachadh mar a tha Bile Conaltraidh a' dol tro Phàrlamaid Bhreatainn. Tha ministearan eile mar Brian MacUilleim, Eilidh Liddell agus Anna NicGuairne a' cumail taic ann an diofar dhòighean cuideachd.

An-diugh, tha sinn a' beachdachadh air bile buill airson na Gàidhlig. Mineachaidh mi mo bhàrail air a' bhile an ainm Mhicheil Ruiseal an ceartair, ach bu toigh leam an toiseach sùil aithghearr a thoirt air ais air na ceithir bliadhna a dh'fhalbh agus gu sònraichte a choimhead air an sgìre Pàrlamaid agam fhèin, na h-Eileanan Siar. Tha mise toilichte le tòrr dhen adhartas a chaidh a dhèanamh, mar eisimpleir, ann a bhith a' trèanadh luchd-teagaisg. Tha fios againn gu bheil bèarn mhòr againn ri lìonadh ma tha sinn airson an t-iarrrtas nàiseanta airson luchd-teagaisg a shàsachadh, ach tha sin a-nis ga dhèanamh. Tha Colaiste a' Chaisteil ann an Leòdhas, ann an co-bhonn le Oilthigh Shrath Chluaidh, air a bhith ag oideachadh luchd-teagaisg. Ann an ùine ghoirid, tha Colaiste a' Chaisteil air barrachd adhartais a dhèanamh airson na Gàidhlig na ionad foghlaim eile ann an Alba.

Tha Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, mar a dhùilicheadh, air leth taiceil cuideachd. Tha barrachd is cairteal de chloinn nan Eilean Siar a' dol tro foghlam Gàidhlig. Is sin adhartas math ach feumar barrachd a dhèanamh agus an àireamh a leudachdadh bliadhna an dèidh bliadhna. Anns na h-Eileanan Siar, tha suidheachadh nan ealan, craoladh agus roinntean eile nas treasa na bha iad o chionn ceithir bliadhna. Chan eil mi idir ag ràdh nach eil feum air barrachd a dhèanamh airson a' chùis a dhèanamh nas cinntiche. Feumaidh sinn cumail a' stri aig a h-uile ìre. Mar a dh'ainmich buill eile na bu tràithe, tha sinn fortanach gu bheil an deasbad air gluasad anns na ceithir bliadhnaichean a dh'fhalbh. Tha an deasbad ann an Alba a-nis cus nas fallaine. Chan eil an deasbad chun na h-aon ìre far a bheil sinn a' faighneachd am bu chòir dhuinn taic a thoirt dhan Ghàidhlig ach ciamar as urrainn dhuinn dèanamh cinnteach gu bheil an taic agus an t-airgead gan cur dha na h-àiteachan ceart.

O chionn ceithir bliadhna, thuirt am pàrtaidh Labarach gun obraicheadh sinn a dh'ionnsaigh inbhe thèarainte airson na Gàidhlig. Bha am poileasaidh sin ceart aig an àm sin. Bha againn ri amas air rudeigin bunaiteach a chur air dòigh an toiseach, agus tha sinn a-nis air mòran de na rudan bunaiteach sin a dhèanamh.

A thaobh a' bhile aig Micheal Ruiseal, tha mi ag aontachadh ris nuair a thuirt e gu bheil uireasbhaidhean mòra ann. Feumar faighneachd cuideachd carson a thug e cho fada do Mhaighstir Ruiseal am bile seo a chur fa chomhair na Pàrlamaid. Nach eil e idir a' tuigsinn mar a tha am Pàrlamaid seo ag obrachadh?

An dèidh sin a ràdh, tha mi a' dol a thoirt taic do phrionnsabalan a' bhile, ach aig an aon àm mìneachaidh mi na h-uireasbhaidhean a tha anns a' bhile. Na bu tràithe an-diugh, thug mi sùil air na thuirt mi anns an deasbad san t-seòmar seo o chionn trì bliadhna. An latha sin, thuirt mi:

"Tha Gàidhlig na neamhnaid luachmhor ann an cridhe 's ann an anam na h-Alba. Chan eil i air a cuingealachadh le crìochan teann. Chan eil i air a crodhadh ann an cùiltean cumhang. Tha Gàidhlig nàiseanta, Eòrpach, agus eadar-nàiseanta. Tha i bunaiteach do dh'Alba. Chan eil i idir air an oir no air chul-fraoin."

Nam bheachd-sa, tha sin a' soilleireachadh na laigse a tha sa bhile aig Maighstir Ruiseal. Tha Micheal Ruiseal a' feuchainn ris an cànan a chròdhadh ann an cùl leatha fhèin aig an àm nuair a tha sinn uile a' strì airson a leudachadh agus a h-àite ceart a thoirt dhith san dùthaich againn. Mar a thuirt mi,

"Feumar a dèanamh gnàthach agus a còraichean a dhèanamh tèarainte. Tha iomadh rud priseil ann an dualchas na h-Alba, ach, nam bharrail-sa, chan eil nì a tha cho aosda, cho domhainn agus cho priseil ri dileab na Gàidhlig."—[*Official Report*, 2 March 2000; Vol 5, c 382-3.]

Tha an deasbad seo air leth feumail, dìreach mar a bha a' chiad deasbad a bha againn anns a' Phàrlamaid o chionn trì bliadhna—a' chiad deasbad Gàidhlig ann am Pàrlamaid ann an Alba ann an 700 bliadhna. Tha mi an dòchas gu bheil mi air beagan mineachaidh a dhèanamh air suidheachadh agus seasamh a' phàrtaidh agam. Tha mi air fheuchainn a mhìneachadh dè bha sinn a' sùileachadh o chionn ceithir bliadhna. Tha mi an dòchas cuideachd gun dèan sinn cinnteach gu bheil sinn a' gluasad ceum air cheum a dh'ionnsaigh inbhe thèarainte. Tha mi làn chinnteach, an dèidh an ath thaghadh, gun gabh am pàrtaidh Labarach na ceumannan ceart a thaobh lagh a stèidheachadh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

In the past four years, we have taken a number of important steps in many relevant areas to advance the cause of the Gaelic language. We should be mindful not only of what the Parliament and the Executive have done—our colleagues at Westminster are also doing their bit. My friend, Calum MacDonald MP, has been working with and lobbying the Government as the Communications Bill has made its progress through the UK Parliament. The ministers Brian Wilson, Helen Liddell and Anne McGuire are also hugely supportive.

Today, we are examining the principles of a member's bill. I will shortly give my view of the bill, but I would like to take a quick look at the past four years, especially in my constituency, the Western Isles. I am pleased with some of the progress, particularly the training of much-needed teachers, but we must continue to train more teachers to satisfy the ever-increasing demand in schools throughout Scotland. Structures and courses to do that are in place—in conjunction with the University of Strathclyde, Lews Castle College is involved in pioneering work to train teachers. Lews Castle College has advanced a great distance in a short time.

As one would expect, the Western Isles Council is supportive and more than 25 per cent of pupils in its schools are educated through the medium of Gaelic. That is good progress, but we must build on that year on year and encourage more parents to recognise the benefits of Gaelic education. In the Western Isles, the Gaelic arts, broadcasting and other areas continue to develop in an ever-improving environment, but that does not mean that there is not more to do. We must not be complacent; we must and will strive to do more in every field and at every level. As has been mentioned, in the past four years the debate about Gaelic has moved on and is healthier. We are now asking how we can ensure that the support and money goes to the right places.

Four years ago, the Labour party pledged that we would make progress towards achieving secure status for the language. That was the right policy at the time because we had to focus on the fundamental challenges.

I agreed with Mike Russell's analysis of his bill when he conceded that it was flawed and had many weaknesses. One must ask oneself why it took Mr Russell so long to produce a bill and why it was produced at such a late stage in the parliamentary session. Does he not know how the procedures work?

I will support Mr Russell's bill, but I will mention some of its weaknesses. Earlier today, I looked back at the debate that we had on the issue three years ago. I will repeat two points that I made on that day. First, I said:

"Gaelic is a precious jewel in the heart and soul of Scotland. It is not constrained within strict boundaries or herded into tight corners. Gaelic is national, European and international. It is fundamental to Scotland; it is not on the periphery or on the fringes."

In my opinion, that point crystallises the weakness in Mike Russell's bill. He is trying to ghettoise the language into a tight corner at a time when we are trying to improve matters.

We must secure the rights of Gaelic because, as I said,

"There are many precious components in the heritage of Scotland, but none is as ancient, as profound and as worthy as the Gaelic legacy."—[*Official Report*, 2 March 2000; Vol 5, c 388.]

The debate is useful, as was the debate we had on the issue three years ago, which was the first such debate in the Parliament in 700 years. I hope that I have outlined my party's view on the issue and what we have done in the past four years. We are moving step by step towards secure status for Gaelic. I am sure that, after the next election, the Labour party will take the right steps to achieve that.

16:14

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Tha mi uabhasach toilichte a bhith ann am Pàrlamaid na h-Alba a-rithist, agus tha mi uabhasach toilichte cuideachd gu bheil deasbad againn an-diugh. Tha mi duilich nach eil mi fileanta anns a' Ghàidhlig fhathast, ach gheall mi gu càraid agam, Kay Matheson, cailleach na cloiche, gum bithinn fileanta mus bithinn sean.

Is e a' Ghàidhlig an cànan a bhruidhinn iad ann an gàradh Eden. Is e cànan romansach a tha anns a' Ghàidhlig. Thuir mo sheanmhair gum biodh Gàidhlig a' cur bacadh oirnn. Tha sin fada càrr. Ma tha dà chànan aig cuideigin, bidh iad a' smaointinn ann an dà dhòigh agus bidh e tòrr nas fhasa dhaibh a bhith ag ionnsachadh chànanan eile.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I am happy to be in the Scottish Parliament again and I am pleased that we are having the debate. I am sorry that I am not fluent in Gaelic yet, but I promised my friend Kay Matheson, better known as cailleach na cloiche, that I would be fluent before I was old.

Gaelic was spoken in the garden of Eden. Gaelic is a romantic language. My grandmother said that Gaelic would hinder us, but that is completely wrong. If someone is bilingual, they think in two ways and it is much easier to learn other languages.

The member continued in English.

We were told by our grandparents that Gaelic would hold us back but, as I have just said, that is nonsense. It is proven to everyone's satisfaction that if someone speaks two languages they can think in two different ways, which makes their thought processes more subtle. They can also much more readily learn other languages. That was not believed when children went to school with no English and left school with no Gaelic, when the language was persecuted and all the discrimination that John Farquhar Munro mentioned took place.

My own story about Gaelic—apart from that of my Gaelic granny who did not want to pass the language on—concerns my wish to join the Gaelic choir at Queen's Park school. I was quite a good singer, but I was turned down because I did not have the Gaelic. If I had been allowed to join that choir in my youth, my Gaelic would be much more fluent than it is now. The headmaster of the school was the then president of An Comunn Gaidhealach, so that did not say much for that organisation's attitude, which was exclusive rather than inclusive. My lure to Gaelic has, therefore, been music. The music is magnificent, and I have listened to it for many weeks of many Mòds.

Nevertheless, Gaelic is a language of enormous literature and poetry. When I was a member of the European Parliament, I was, for some years, the chair of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages. I visited many places where there is a declining language, such as Sard, in Sardinia. Breton, on the other hand, seems to have mastered the decline that was happening in Brittany. John Hume and I lodged a budget line for lesser-used languages. There is great European sympathy for the situation. I do not think that the Urdu question is really relevant, as Urdu is not in danger of extinction. Even if no Urdu speaker were left in Scotland, Urdu would still be Urdu in all its literature. The position is not the same. However, within these islands we have seen Cornish and Manx go.

For many years of my parliamentary career in Europe, I sat with the members of Fianna Fáil, who all had quite a bit of Irish. John Farquhar Munro mentioned compulsion. The Fianna Fáil members had been forced to learn Irish to higher level to get into university. They were all forced to go to an Irish language summer school, although I think that they would have had a rattling good time there. That was the tradition. There was quite a lot of compulsion, although the requirement to learn Irish to get into a university has now been removed. The Fianna Fáil members were not natural Gaelic speakers, and there was resentment among some of them about the compulsion, so I am not in favour of compulsion. I am with John Farquhar Munro on that.

“A Fresh Start for Gaelic” discusses secure status. It says:

“There is a very strong feeling within the Gaelic community that at best the timetable”

that was set out for Gaelic in the promises of the Government’s manifesto

“has been extended, or at worst that all parties have reneged on their commitment”.

I do not see any argument against granting Gaelic secure status. It is a step forward. The financial difficulties can surely be resolved. Gaelic is worth a blank cheque.

16:19

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I congratulate Mike Russell on bringing the bill before the Parliament and giving us the opportunity to debate the ways in which we might reverse the alarming decline in Gaelic speaking in Scotland. It is a great pity that my colleague Baroness Ray Michie was not elected to the Parliament and has not had the opportunity to contribute to the debate. She is passionate about the Gaelic language and its future and she would have been one of the key signatories to the bill, supporting Mike Russell all the way. It is, therefore, regrettable that she is not here to take part in this debate.

I believe that my constituency of Argyll and Bute has the second-largest number of Gaelic speakers of all parliamentary constituencies. I might be corrected on that, but a large number of Gaelic speakers live on the islands and on the mainland within my constituency. I am not a Gaelic speaker. Indeed, I occasionally struggle with the English language, never mind a second language. However, I strongly support the Gaelic language and I believe that we must take all possible steps to secure its future and to turn around the decline in Gaelic speaking throughout Scotland.

I regularly visit schools throughout my constituency and Gaelic is taught in many of them.

I see at first hand the benefits for children who are being educated in both English and Gaelic. Teachers and parents tell me that learning in both languages stands their children in good stead for the future and improves their ability to learn other languages. Dr Ewing made that point and she said, rightly, that learning in Gaelic helps children to think more diversely. There is proof that learning in Gaelic is good for children. Parents and teachers tell me that religiously when I visit schools to listen to Gaelic classes.

I do not need to be persuaded that the bill is needed and that it can bring benefits. However, I welcome Mike Russell’s acknowledgement in his opening statement that achieving secure status alone will not be enough to save the Gaelic language. I accept his argument that securing the language’s status will help to underpin the language’s future in Scotland. However, there are fundamental concerns about how the bill’s objectives can be delivered on the ground.

In my constituency, the fundamental barrier to the stabilisation and resuscitation of the language is the shortage of Gaelic teachers. That continuing concern is relayed to me as I go round the schools. In every school that I visit the teachers and education officials say that there is an unmet need in their area and that if they had more Gaelic teachers they could educate more children in Gaelic.

The bill, of course, does not address that fundamental concern. However, I suggest that the issue of the shortage of Gaelic teachers must be addressed. If it is not, the bill’s objectives will not be achieved. I would appreciate it if Mike Russell would address that fundamental point in his winding-up speech. It seems to me that the bill and the shortage of teachers must be addressed simultaneously. If we pass the bill, we must have sufficient Gaelic teachers to deliver the language to the widest number of children.

I have two other concerns, which are both about local authorities. Do local authorities and other public bodies have the resources, in terms of the numbers of Gaelic speakers that they employ, to meet the bill’s requirements? Argyll and Bute Council has genuine concerns about its ability to do so. What would the penalties be if a council, for whatever reason, could not fulfil the proposed act’s objectives, not from a reluctance to do so but because, for example, of a lack of Gaelic teachers or Gaelic-speaking employees? I would appreciate an explanation of how such a situation would be addressed.

I also have concerns about the ghettoising of the Gaelic language into the small geographical area that the bill outlines. I listened to Mike Russell’s reasons for going down that route. Nevertheless, if we are to stem the decline of the Gaelic language,

surely it must be encouraged throughout Scotland. We must address that head on because we cannot duck it. I ask Mike Russell to explain in more detail why he took the approach of encouraging the language only in a narrow geographical area rather than adopt the Welsh approach. I understand that, in a significantly large area of Wales, Welsh was not previously spoken.

I will support the bill's principles and I believe that Parliament must do so also, otherwise Parliament will send out a signal to Scotland that it is not serious about saving the Gaelic language.

16:24

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I support the principles of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill, which Mike Russell promoted and which is being debated. I know that he has put much effort into the bill and he is to be congratulated on that. Mike Russell knows, because I discussed the matter with him, that I have deep reservations about the details of the bill as introduced.

I am disappointed by the narrowness of the bill's application. Many Gaelic campaigners share my view, as Mike Russell knows. For example, the view was expressed at the cross-party group on Gaelic in the Scottish Parliament that zonal proposals were dangerous and that the bill had the potential to create divisions. We must ensure that that does not happen.

The scope of the bill should not be limited to the Gaidhealtachd. That gives the wrong message to Scotland, marginalising Gaelic at a time when we want it to be accepted as a normal language for the whole country. Gaelic belongs to all of Scotland, not just to some of the crofting counties. There are Gaelic speakers and there is Gaelic-medium education throughout the country—in Glasgow, as Pauline McNeill noted, and in Sarah Boyack's constituency. There are people who are interested in Gaelic although they do not speak it, and people who do not speak it, but send their children to school to learn it.

No authority or agency should use the bill's present form as an excuse to cut back on its provision for Gaelic. Currently, over 20 local authorities in Scotland apply for a specific grant for Gaelic, an indication of the widespread interest in the language. The bill should be amended so that it applies throughout Scotland in a flexible way. Areas such as Orkney or Shetland should not be burdened with legislation that has little relevance there; that would create bitterness. The formula used in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 could be used by local authorities and public bodies to assess the need for Gaelic in their areas and to act accordingly—with the caveat that

the decisions be examined so that we are sure that no hidden need is being stifled.

The Education, Culture and Sport Committee should take additional evidence from the local authorities outwith the Gaidhealtachd to see how flexibility might be built into the bill if it were amended to include all of Scotland. It is a pity that the bill has come before us at the 11th hour, at the very end of this parliamentary session, in a form that is difficult for some of us to accept. The Parliament should not pass a bill that is less than what we aspire to. Mike Russell has indicated his willingness to amend the bill to address our concerns. I hope that that can be done.

The debate on this bill and other debates in the chamber have raised the profile of Gaelic in Scotland. The Executive is also to be congratulated on its support for Gaelic. The recommendations of the ministerial advisory group on Gaelic are being rolled out. Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba has been set up and has a key role to play in overseeing any Gaelic language bill. That is why I am confident that there will soon be a Gaelic language bill, if not in this session of Parliament, then in the next. I commend the bill to the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh): If Jamie Stone makes a brief speech, we will have time to hear a brief speech from Jackie Baillie as well.

16:28

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Tha neamhnaidean Gàidhlig againn fhathast air costa an ear Chataibh. Tha iad anabarrach priseil, agus feumaidh sinn feuchainn ri an sàbhaladh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

We still have pearls of Gaelic on the east coast of Sutherland. They are deeply precious and we must try to save them.

The member continued in English.

The pearls of Gaelic that I spoke of are hanging on by their fingernails. There is a rich variety of Gaelic—Sutherland and east Sutherland Gaelic, north-west Sutherland Gaelic, Sgitheanach Gaelic and Lewis Gaelic are all different—and that variety is like a multifaceted diamond. It is hugely important.

There are now fewer Gaelic speakers on the east coast of Sutherland than there are fingers on my hand. However, I believe that this bill—even at one minute to midnight, which we have now reached—would halt that fatal decline. Variety is hugely important and I urge members to support the bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As that speech was so short, we can have a full-size speech from Jackie Baillie.

Mr Stone: Well, in that case—[*Laughter.*]

16:29

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): It is worth remembering that, aside from Nova Scotia, Scotland is the home of the Gaelic language. That gives us a unique responsibility as guardians of our cultural heritage.

I am not interested in an artificial reculturalisation of Scotland. The Labour party and I are committed to ensuring that Gaelic is recognised as an official language in Scotland with the same status as English so that, protected, it may flourish. That is why, with one important reservation that I will deal with later, the Labour party supports the principles of the bill.

Equal status is important, but if that equal status is not linked to a perceivable change, we will be paying only lip service to our heritage. True security for Gaelic will come from the way in which its new status is incorporated into policy.

The bill can only ever be considered as one step on the way. The broader commitment to protecting Gaelic is much greater. Those of us who consider the bill to be a one-stop answer to our responsibilities will be disappointed, because, as we have heard already, it does not address the important issue of Gaelic-medium education, which is essential for the survival of the language, as is the training of more Gaelic teachers. The Executive has made those matters priorities.

We must put the bill's proposals in the context of considerable Executive progress. The Executive has already shown its commitment to a secure future for Gaelic in Scotland. The fact that we have a Cabinet minister with responsibility for Gaelic for the first time is a start, although that means very little without policy progress and implementation. However, there is plenty of progress to show. Perhaps the most significant development is the creation of the new Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba, which met for the first time, as we heard, last month and of itself should provide a significant boost to the language's status in Scotland.

The majority of the evidence that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee received reflected my main reservation about the bill—its geographical coverage. As local authorities will be in control of their own plans, I can see no reason to limit the bill to a particular area. An amended version of the bill to require all local authorities to prepare language plans would also allow for flexibility between council areas on the simple basis of need.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I welcome the committee's acknowledgement of the need for a bill that is not modest, but applies to the whole of Scotland. I strongly support Jackie Baillie's point about Gaelic-medium education, as I have a Gaelic nursery and a Gaelic-medium education unit at Tollcross in my constituency. People are committed to Gaelic-medium education. If the bill is passed, the committee's commitment to amend it at stage 2 will give us a much stronger bill, not the modest bill about which several members have talked. I would welcome that as a local MSP.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are back to a brief speech from Jackie Baillie.

Jackie Baillie: Sarah Boyack is right. We should acknowledge that Gaelic speakers and supporters live in all areas of the country. A geographically limited approach could end up creating new divisions.

There has been considerable development and activity in areas that are not listed in the bill. We have heard about the examples of Edinburgh and Glasgow. Although the bill is of greater significance to some areas than it is to others, a broad, nationally targeted piece of legislation will ensure that nobody is discriminated against on the basis of their postcode.

If we agree to extend the bill to all Scotland, as I believe that we should, the committee will need to take further evidence. In particular, it would be useful to consider further how we implement the bill alongside local authorities and whether the provisions on language plans will need to be amended to reflect the new flexibility that I mentioned.

We need to be sure that we get it right so that we can ensure the future prosperity of Gaelic in Scotland. The debate is a chance for us to make the most of a new momentum. Maintaining that momentum and taking the time to produce good, practical policy are not mutually exclusive. I therefore urge members to support the bill's principles.

16:33

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I make it clear that, when the bill first came before the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, I was very sceptical. Indeed, I am on record as having expressed reservations about secure status for Gaelic. I saw problems with the bill everywhere. I worried about the potential for political manoeuvring and unreasonable demands for extra money. I worried about Gaelic signs sprouting up all over the country in places where no Gaelic has ever been spoken and about councils having to take on extra staff.

At that point, the principle bothered me because of the way that I thought it might turn out in practice. A turning point in my attitude to the bill came when I asked Professor Kenneth MacKinnon to give examples of how Gaelic had been discriminated against through the lack of its recognition as a national language. Professor MacKinnon told me that a recent application to the national lottery for assistance for playgroups, which was being funded for English-language playgroups,

“was turned down with the specific explanation that Gaelic is not an official language.”

He also said:

“One can go into a telephone booth in a railway station in Scotland and press a button for the Welsh language, but there is no button for Gaelic.”—[*Official Report, Education, Culture and Sport Committee*, 10 December; c 3298.]

According to BT, that is because Welsh is an official language, whereas Gaelic is not. Rightly or wrongly, that made me angry, and if it made me angry, what the heck did it do to people who speak Gaelic?

It seems utterly wrong that a person speaking or writing in a living, indigenous language with a long history and tradition in our nation should be made to feel that his or her language is thought of as second class and is undervalued and treated with a lack of respect by institutions and public bodies, which have a duty to serve the public. That is a wrong that must be righted. I recognise that the Executive has done a good deal for the Gaelic language, expanding support for Gaelic-medium education, recognising the importance of Gaelic broadcasting and establishing Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba. It seems, however, that as far as a Gaelic language bill was concerned, the Executive has been procrastinating. I believe that the committee was convinced of that. A push was needed, and the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill now before us gave us an opportunity to move things forward.

There are many flaws and problematic elements about the details of the bill, but if we accept that its central principle is based on a wish to legitimise Gaelic as a language to be treated with equal respect to English, I must urge Parliament to support it.

There are three particular provisions that seem to be problematic. First, there is the initial division of Scotland into a Gaelic area and a non-Gaelic area. In particular, there is the omission of Glasgow and Edinburgh. That seemed to fly in the face of the whole idea of Gaelic having a national identity and national status. Like others, I suggest that we make changes in that direction.

Secondly, the financial resolution dealt only with the establishment of Gaelic language plans. As Mike Russell admitted, it did not, and could not,

give details of the costs of the long-term implementation of those plans, which may differ in different parts of the country.

Thirdly, I have doubts about the precise meaning of the term

“on a basis of equality”.

Did that really mean the sprouting of Gaelic-language signs across the whole country? Did that really mean that somebody could demand that a policeman in Dumfries should speak to him in Gaelic? Nothing so extreme is in any way foreshadowed under the terms of the bill. The phrase “basis of equality” is used in the Welsh Language Act 1993, and the evidence that was presented to the committee gave us comfort in that regard. The Welsh Language Board has successfully implemented a policy of gradualism—not fundamentalism—in rolling out the provisions of the 1993 act. There have been good examples of public bodies in Scotland already treating Gaelic with respect and giving it the legitimacy that it deserves. They include the National Museums of Scotland and the Scottish Arts Council, which have honourable records in that regard.

The formation of a language plan by public bodies need not be an onerous task, nor do the provisions of such a plan need to be unduly burdensome. As others have said, there is real flexibility and reasonableness in the bill's provisions as they are envisioned by the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. I commend the committee's report to the Parliament, as well as the bill. I do not ask the Parliament today to support the details of the bill, in which there are many difficulties and which needs much revision, but there is an issue of cultural justice here. I believe that the central principle of the bill should be acknowledged by the Parliament and should be given our support at stage 1.

16:38

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

“Can you tell me where my country lies?
Said the unifaun to his true love's eyes”.

Where indeed is our country? What is it? What makes us Scots? Where is the heartbeat? We could debate those questions for a whole day and more, but what is beyond dispute is that the Gaelic language and the wider Gaelic culture form part, not just of Scottish culture, but of British culture too. Gaelic is a treasure of emotions, imagination, creativity, romance and tragedy, and it deserves our support. It deserves the support even of monosyllabic monoglots such as me.

There have of course been criticisms of the bill, which is to be expected—no bill attracts no

criticism. Some deep analysis took place during the committee's scrutiny and evidence taking, and I believe that many of the contradictions with which people are concerned will be ironed out at stage 2, if the bill reaches that stage. For instance, there is concern that there is not immediate national coverage for the bill, and that is to be met by amendment. On the other hand, the minister has suggested that criticism might arise in the case that there is national coverage, given the costs that that will bring. The Parliament will have to face up to such dilemmas at a later stage. In our party's view, we should amend the bill to give it national coverage.

That is the correct way to go, because the bill provides flexibility in the Gaelic language plans. The fact that those plans reflect local need should assuage all the concerns that people have about signs springing up everywhere and every museum or gallery exhibit having to be identified in Gaelic. Let us be honest: we should put ourselves into the minds of Gaels who saw that every sign in their land was in English. Let us think about how they felt and analyse what we should have done then, against how we treat Gaelic now. We must ensure that our actions are appropriate and can develop. If movement is too fast and forces itself it will create a backlash that will work against the interests of Gaelic and Gaelic culture. Let us take the modest step that Mike Russell suggests, but let us amend the bill to make it more workable.

There has also been concern about the phrase "basis of equality". As Mike Russell said, that phrase stems from the Welsh Language Act 1993, which the Conservatives developed. That key phrase was tested at the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, and, indeed, Ian Jenkins and I made many attempts to find a better phraseology. However, we were told that trying to explain it better and refine it to relieve concerns in fact made difficulties with the bill more likely. Therefore I am satisfied that the phrase "basis of equality" is required in the bill.

In a sense, secure status is mainly symbolic. However, it is an important symbol to many people, so it deserves support. It has been said—and it is almost a truism—that Gaelic-medium education is the salvation that we must push forward. However, there are difficulties with the number of Gaelic-medium teachers and with councils—such as the City of Edinburgh Council—obstructing the path. Those difficulties must be overcome. By obtaining secure status for Gaelic, we can encourage that process.

Mike Watson seemed not mean spirited, but grudging about the bill. I have seen him speak more warmly; admittedly, that may be explained by the fact that there were 200 Gaels in the audience at the time.

A mind is like a parachute—it functions only when it is open. I welcome Mike Russell's open attitude to reform. I hope that the minister will also have an open attitude to the bill at later stages.

16:42

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I gather that I was showing up on the Presiding Officer's screen as Alex Neil. That is truly terrifying for all concerned.

This could be a special day for the Parliament, whose reputation has been battered and bruised in the Highlands and Islands, as it has across Scotland. However, with this emotive and symbolic legislation the Parliament can send out a very strong message. It is not every day that we get to kick-start the process of saving a national language.

I pay tribute to Mike Russell for the work that he has put into the bill and for his speech today. He said two things of immense importance. First, he said that the bill is achievable. This measure has not been introduced just to fill time in a debating chamber at the fag end of a session of Parliament. It is an opportunity to revitalise the Gaelic language and to pass legislation. If members of the Parliament want to pass the bill, that will happen.

Secondly, Mike Russell's speech embodied the consensual approach that is essential to this issue. After all, the Parliament was supposed to be about consensus. Mr Russell mentioned that the bill or similar measures were promised in the manifestos of the Liberal Democrats, the Labour party and the SNP. We can work together to make this happen.

In that context, Alasdair Morrison's speech was particularly depressing. His inability to rise to the occasion never fails to surprise me. We can all disagree with aspects of the bill, but let us do so with dignity rather than with a sneer. Mr Morrison accused Mike Russell of introducing the bill late in the day. Perhaps he would like to reflect on why it was left to Mike Russell to do that, given that when he was the minister responsible for Gaelic he had the opportunity to introduce precisely such a bill—an opportunity that he chose to let pass.

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport identified a number of problems with the bill. He asks some legitimate questions, but the problems with the bill are by no means insuperable. He made the point, which other members have made, that there is confusion about whether equal status should apply throughout Scotland or, as in the bill, only in certain areas of Scotland. The minister disagrees with the committee—it is his right to do so—but the logic of that is that he supports the original bill. I have to say that I do not really care

that much which way the bill goes, as long as we get the Parliament to vote to put the bill through.

Mr Stone: Will the member give way?

Mr Hamilton: No, I will not give way at this point. I draw to members' attention the committee's report, because it details innovative prospects for getting around the problem. It suggests that, rather than drawing arbitrary lines on a map, we could use a more sophisticated demographic profile and consider areas such as Edinburgh, or Glasgow, or any area where there is a demand. There is a way around the problem.

The minister went on to argue that because of the lack of financial detail, the bill as it stands is flawed. I suggest a number of things to the minister. First, until we know which of the amendments is going to be accepted, it is impossible to know how much the provisions will cost. If they are to apply nationwide, the financial imperative will be different from what it would be if they were to apply on the restricted basis that Mr Russell proposed.

I refer the minister to the evidence given to the committee by the Welsh Language Board, which stated:

"Too often, investment in Welsh-medium or Gaelic-medium education or public services is perceived as investment in Welsh or in Gaelic. That perception is mistaken. Such investment should be seen primarily as investment in education or better service provision, rather than as something additional. Language is a part of society; it should not be seen as something that is apart from society."—[*Official Report, Education, Culture and Sport Committee*, 14 January 2003; c 3397.]

On that basis, we have to consider the measures in the bill in a wider frame.

Mr Stone: Will the member give way?

Mr Hamilton: I am sorry, but I do not have time. I say to the Executive that the one thing that we need to hear from the minister when he sums up is that the Executive will give the bill parliamentary time and lodge amendments to give it every prospect of being on the statute book. Nobody can know the result of the election and, frankly, this issue is far too big for us to get involved in petty point scoring. If the minister wants to work with the rest of the parties here, we can get the bill through. The bill is an opportunity; it is essential and symbolic and it can be the catalyst for retaining and revitalising the Gaelic language and culture.

16:47

Mike Watson: The debate has been enjoyable, and whatever Brian Monteith said about my mood—whether it is downbeat or otherwise—that is not the way that I feel, so I am sorry if that is the way that I came across. I thank the interpreters for

the assistance that they have provided this afternoon, which has been valuable.

It has been claimed that the bill will start the process of rebuilding the Gaelic language and will begin repairing what some have described as the damage of centuries. That is hyperbole, because it is not the start of the Gaelic revival and passing the bill will not be the end of it. Nor would support for the bill be the only indicator of support for Gaelic. I have already outlined the effects of the Executive's record on Gaelic. Despite what has been said, it has contributed to the vitality of the language.

The language's future is crucial. The numbers learning in Gaelic-medium education are the key. I think that Winnie Ewing mentioned her grandmother. I had a great-grandmother who spoke only Gaelic. That was lost to my family and I did not even discover that fact until about two years ago. I do not want other families to suffer that fate. That has informed the approach that I have taken in my dealings with Gaelic in my ministerial portfolio.

Murdo Fraser accused me of nit-picking in relation to the bill. I am guilty as charged. It is the minister's job to nit-pick, and I will not apologise for that. It is important that bills have proper consideration. On Duncan Hamilton's point about there being time for the bill to complete its progress, I do not know whether there is time between now and the end of the month. The fact that the bill was introduced just 17 weeks prior to dissolution is no reason for us to telescope the process and not give it proper consideration. I do not think that anybody here would recommend that, because we all know that law put together hurriedly is often later much regretted.

I stress a point that George Lyon and John Farquhar Munro mentioned. Teachers are the key, which is why, as I said, we are putting the bulk of our resources into and focusing our attention on ensuring that as many teachers as possible are trained to be able to teach in Gaelic. There is obviously a limit. We can make places available in teacher training colleges—and places are increasingly available—but people have to want to come forward and take up the available posts once they have qualified.

Pauline McNeill mentioned the developments in Glasgow. The Gaelic-medium school—Bunsgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu—is a good example of those developments. Its numbers have reached record levels. I have had a meeting with the board and the head teacher, Donalda McComb, to try to find increased accommodation. The most interesting statistic is the fact that 60 per cent of the parents of children at the school do not speak Gaelic. That underscores the point that George Lyon and John Farquhar Munro made.

I also take on board the point that John Farquhar Munro made about the need to find a balance between demand and provision. That is important, and we are working towards such a balance in our provision.

We have considered the bill from the point of view of what is necessary to support the effort that is already going in. As I have said, substantial amendment of the areas in which the bill is defective is necessary. During the debate, members have acknowledged that by expressing concerns about the bill's practical impact.

I do not accept Duncan Hamilton's point that there is an absolute divide between saying that, in the areas that it covers, the bill is fine as it is, and saying that it would cause a problem if it were extended to cover the whole of Scotland. For a start, it would be a considerable time before there was a sufficient number of teachers to allow the bill to be introduced throughout Scotland in places where there is demand.

I want an increase in the number of teachers and in the number of places at colleges. We are working towards that. That is what will secure the future of Gaelic language and culture. We must ensure that the people who want to have their children taught in Gaelic-medium education have the opportunity to do that, and that, as those children grow up, Gaelic is a living language and a living culture. That is how we will secure the future of Gaelic.

I echo the point that Ian Jenkins made about there being Gaelic road signs between Hawick and Jedburgh, which I am sure would give him the shivers, Tayside police having to produce their annual reports in Gaelic, and all public officials having to learn Gaelic. Those chestnuts are not the issues—they are not what the bill is about and it is not helpful to make such suggestions.

I must return to the point that Duncan Hamilton made about the financial information. The information is unsatisfactory. When one does not know what amendments there will be, one must be prepared to provide examples of the cost parameters, which will depend on the nature of the amendments that are lodged. I have made that point already. It would not be beyond Michael Russell to do that and I hope that he will do so. If he wants to work with officials in doing that, such assistance will be made available to him.

The Executive will support the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mike Russell to wind up the debate. You have eight minutes, but it would be helpful if you could shave a little bit off that.

16:52

Michael Russell: I will do my best to shave a little bit off my speech.

I welcome the Parliament's positive support for the bill. Although I would be grateful if members supported the bill at stage 1, that is not the end of the process. As members—especially Murdo Fraser—have indicated, stage 1 of the bill represents the start of a process that can be completed in this parliamentary session.

Like Duncan Hamilton, I want to address the point that was made by Alasdair Morrison and Maureen Macmillan, who is convener of the cross-party group on Gaelic in the Scottish Parliament. They asked me why I did not introduce the bill earlier. I plead guilty to trusting the word of the Deputy Minister for Highlands and Islands and Gaelic, who, in October 1999, said that he had the matter on a fast track. I did not know that Alasdair Morrison would let down the Gaelic-speaking people of Scotland and his constituency. If I did not know that then, I know it now.

The bill is perfectly possible to achieve. The reality of the situation is that the bill can be achieved if members choose to vote for it because they want it to be achieved.

I will respond to the positive points that have been made in the debate. The model for the debate is undoubtedly Ian Jenkins, who changed his mind during the stage 1 process. He admitted that.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): He could change it again.

Michael Russell: He could. Like me, the convener of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee has long experience of Mr Jenkins changing his mind during meetings. Having changed his mind on the bill once in five weeks, he has stuck to that position. Ian Jenkins is a model for the bill, as he saw the reality of the situation. I pay tribute to the members of the committee who saw the reality of the situation and recognised that the bill was necessary. I pay tribute, too, to Winnie Ewing, whose lifelong dedication to the cause was reflected in her speech today.

Unusually, I pay particular tribute to George Lyon, who asked the most—[*Interruption.*] It is possible; this is a most unusual day. He asked the most searching questions of any member about the bill. He asked about the detail of the bill and the things that needed to be done. I will respond to him.

First, education is absolutely central. A member's bill of this nature cannot of itself produce new teachers, but it can produce a new confidence within the community, a new determination and a new feeling on the island of

lle in George Lyon's constituency, where I was on Monday, that it is worth while pursuing the matter. It takes time to produce teachers. I say to the minister that teachers cannot simply be produced from Gaelic-medium education; other ways will have to be found. Let us get the bill in place and work on that.

Secondly, on resources, some councils are already spending money on Gaelic, but the wisest evidence, from the Welsh Language Board, made the clear point that that is integral to work, not extra to it. The bill might mean changing some patterns of work, but if additional resources are required—and I shall deal with that in my comments to the minister in a moment—that will need to be addressed head on.

There is no penalty in the bill. In one area, I departed from the Comunn na Gàidhlig proposals, because the reality of the situation is that the Comunn na Gàidhlig approach of fining or setting up punitive sanctions does not work. Ultimately, the only sanction in the bill is naming and shaming those who do not implement it, but I hope that by that stage people will realise that they should be doing so.

Finally, George Lyon asked how we can open up the whole issue and spread it across Scotland. Indeed, that point was referred to again and again. The Education, Culture and Sport Committee's view—and I respect that view—was that Gaelic should be seen as a national language. In those circumstances, there should be a wide responsibility, but George Lyon's points about resources reflect upon that too, because if resources are limited, it might be wiser to apply them in a smaller area for more effect at an earlier stage, rather than spread them more widely.

I am open to how that debate progresses. If the bill is amended to make it apply across Scotland, there will have to be a concomitant amendment that does not lay a heavy duty on, for example, Shetland or Orkney. Indeed, it is perfectly possible, using the example of Gaelic in the education national priorities, to have an authority say in the first phrase of a Gaelic language plan, "We are not having a Gaelic language plan because we do not need one." That would be the situation, I am sure, for Orkney and Shetland, although they might want to—generously—publish a leaflet or two and perhaps do it in Old Norse as well.

The reality of the situation in Mr Lyon's constituency—which is, I am sorry to disappoint him, the constituency with the third-highest concentration of Gaelic speakers—is that Gaelic is a vital part not just of social development or community development, but of economic development. Investment in Gaelic in that place will pay dividends.

I will address the minister's question on resources. I will take up his generous offer; I am happy to meet his officials to discuss the matter. We operate in this Parliament by the standing orders. The financial memorandum as submitted conforms to rule 9.3.2. It had to, otherwise the Presiding Officer would not have given the bill a certificate of competence. The bill has been introduced under that memorandum. If the proposals in the bill change after stage 1, of course there will be a changed financial memorandum, but the introduction of the financial resolution—which only ministers can do—is dependent on the stage 1 process. The information is in the memorandum. It conforms to the stage 1 process, therefore it conforms to the standing orders of the Parliament. I would be happy to have a meeting with officials, but the minister knows that, if the financial resolution is not moved, stage 2 cannot move ahead. Developing the financial resolution and then moving it are something that we can do jointly.

Many other points were raised in the debate, which was, by and large, positive and good tempered.

Karen Gillon: Will the member give way?

Michael Russell: No, I am afraid that I cannot, because I am almost out of time; I am in my last minute.

Mr Monteith answered Mr Fraser's question about the use of the phrase "basis of equality". It was a Tory phrase in a Tory act. It was the best phrase for the time and, after extensive investigation, it remains the best phrase now.

I ask members to support the bill at stage 1. More important, I ask members to realise that there is a will and a commitment in Scotland to have the bill not only pass at stage 1, but complete its passage and be in place—*[Interruption.]* Members in the back rows of the Labour benches might still be sniping, but we will attempt to have the Parliament pass the bill. We will attempt to honour the commitment that exists in Scotland and to do what we can to save the Gaelic language.

I commend the bill to the chamber.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is consideration of seven Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Euan Robson to move motions S1M-3977, S1M-3978, S1M-3979, S1M-3980, S1M-3981, S1M-3982 and S1M-3998 en bloc. The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000 (Modification of Enactments) Order 2003 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Petrol Filling Stations, Public Houses and Hotels) (Scotland) Order 2003 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Budget (Scotland) Act 2002 Amendment Order 2003 be approved.—[*Euan Robson.*]

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I ask for a bit of hush as I have an announcement to make. As required by the new standing orders that were agreed to yesterday, I wish to inform members that this session of the Parliament will end at midnight on 31 March 2003. Dissolution will therefore begin immediately thereafter, on 1 April. By virtue of rule 13.3.4A, which the Parliament also agreed to yesterday, it follows that the last day on which written questions may be lodged in this session of the Parliament is 17 March.

Following consultation with the party leaders, I intend that the first meeting of the new parliamentary session should be on Wednesday 7 May. Newly elected members will be advised of that date after the election. Further details will be published in tomorrow's business bulletin, which I recommend that all members read.

There are 11 questions to be put to the chamber as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S1M-3986.2, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of David McLetchie, on the record of the Scottish Executive, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)

Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)

Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Grn)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 68, Against 46, Abstentions 4.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S1M-3986.1, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of David McLetchie, on the record of the Scottish Executive, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Grn)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)

Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 31, Against 86, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S1M-3986, in the name of David McLetchie, on the record of the Scottish Executive, as amended, be agreed to. Are agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)

Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)

Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Grn)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 68, Against 48, Abstentions 3.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes that four years of government by Labour and the Liberal Democrats in Scotland have delivered a clear record of achievement which includes, amongst many other accomplishments, a full legislative programme and Executive action in urban and rural areas that has led to record investment in the health service, the abolition of tuition fees, the introduction of free personal care for older people, nursery places for all three- and four-year-olds whose parents want them, record numbers of police, an increase in the seizure of class "A" drugs by 173%, freezing business rates, rates relief for small businesses and a substantial programme for long-term investment in transport; notes that Scotland has achieved the lowest level of unemployment for 25 years, and further believes that the next Parliament will have every opportunity to build upon the foundations laid in this first session for a prosperous, confident Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S1M-3618, in the name of Michael Russell, on the general principles of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill.

The member has provided the following translation:

Gu bheil a' Phàrlamaid a' toirt taic do phrionnsabalan coitcheann Bile Cànan na Gàidhlig (Alba).

The Presiding Officer: Unless any member objects, I will put the question on the approval of the seven Scottish statutory instruments set out in the business bulletin en bloc.

The question is, that motions S1M-3977, S1M-3978, S1M-3979, S1M-3980, S1M-3981, S1M-3982 and S1M-3998, in the name of Patricia

Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000 (Modification of Enactments) Order 2003 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Petrol Filling Stations, Public Houses and Hotels) (Scotland) Order 2003 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Budget (Scotland) Act 2002 Amendment Order 2003 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Fairtrade Towns

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S1M-3691, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on Scotland's Fairtrade towns. The debate will be concluded without any questions being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates the towns of Strathaven and Aberfeldy on becoming Scotland's first fair trade towns; recognises the vision of both South Lanarkshire and Perth and Kinross councils in this regard; commends the commitment of the respective fair trade groups in achieving this status, and notes that fair trade can be beneficial to both national and international suppliers and consumers.

17:07

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I must first declare an interest as a former member of the steering group for Strathaven Fairtrade town initiative and now as patron of the Strathaven Fairtrade group.

This is Fairtrade fortnight and I am absolutely delighted to secure this debate congratulating Strathaven and Aberfeldy on being declared Scotland's first Fairtrade towns, particularly as I live in Strathaven and represent the town in Parliament. As a result, members will understand if I speak particularly of Strathaven. My colleague Mr John Swinney will talk more about Aberfeldy.

Quite simply, fair trade is trade that gives a better deal to those who produce the goods. It is a way of trying, despite heavily stacked odds, to make globalisation work for the poor and to reduce poverty. More than 500,000 workers in developing countries already get a better deal from fair trade through the Fairtrade Foundation. The use of the Fairtrade mark shows consumers that they are buying goods that in some measure challenge the conventional model of trade and offer a sustainable future for the producers.

Four and a half million growers and their families in 36 countries participate in fair trade and their goods are sold in 17 countries across Europe, North America and Japan. At this point, I had hoped to introduce Comfort Kwaasibea and Rijayatu Razak from a cocoa-producing farm in Ghana. However, I see that they have not managed to make it to the debate. I hope that members will be able to meet them, because they are touring the country during Fairtrade fortnight and visiting venues where Divine chocolate is sold.

Of course, Divine chocolate is only one of more than 100 food products with the Fairtrade mark that we can enjoy. People can find the label on coffee, tea, cocoa, chocolate, sugar, honey,

biscuits, cakes, fresh fruit and juices. The Fairtrade Foundation continues to work hard to expand the product range for coming years.

Sales of food with the Fairtrade mark are rising dramatically. Some £46 million was spent in the United Kingdom on Fairtrade foods in 2001-02—that is an incredible £1.50 spent per second. Since 1999, understanding of the meaning of the Fairtrade mark has doubled from 12 per cent to 24 per cent. The UK performs very well with regard to fair trade; it is now the second-largest fair trade market in the world. I am pleased that Strathaven and Aberfeldy are now playing an active part in that.

I first had the idea of Strathaven's potential as a Fairtrade town when I heard that Garstang had been declared England's first Fairtrade town. I want to put on record my thanks to Bruce Crowther of the Garstang group, who was very helpful. It was not long before the initial informal steering group organised a public meeting to test support for the initiative in Strathaven. I thank Oxfam for helping us to organise that. We got that support from the community and the movement has grown at a tremendous rate.

Many groups and individuals must be thanked for their support. The local churches, which had already been holding an annual Traidcraft fair, have been highly supportive of our initiative. I particularly thank the office bearers of the group. Paolo Quadros, the chairman, is a Brazilian chap whose enthusiasm knows no bounds. Without that driving force, we would have been hard pushed to reach our target of being Scotland's first Fairtrade town along with Aberfeldy. I thank Sandy Grant, who has retired from teaching at Strathaven Academy and is Oxfam's local representative in the town. Again, he has been instrumental in driving the project, along with lots of local primary and secondary school children. I also thank Margaret Morton, a local businesswoman, who is our secretary. She works extremely hard to get the word over and to raise support.

I mentioned the rising support and I was particularly pleased that the seven primary schools in Strathaven took part in our schools project for Fairtrade. On Saturday we held an exhibition and a poster competition, to which we had 180 entries. The level of understanding of fair trade among those primary 6 and 7 pupils was outstanding. Some of the pupils at Strathaven Academy are also working on Fairtrade projects.

None of that would have been possible without South Lanarkshire Council, which has backed the Fairtrade initiative right from the start. I particularly want to thank Councillor Jim Malloy, who gave us much support from the outset, as did Councillor Chris Thompson and Councillor Eddie McAvoy, the leader of South Lanarkshire Council.

Strathaven town has seven entrances, all of which say "Welcome to Strathaven, Scotland's first Fairtrade Town with Aberfeldy". We want to sustain Strathaven's Fairtrade status and to make sure that there are on-going events in Strathaven to promote that. Of course we will always have our major exhibitions and initiatives during Fairtrade fortnight.

The issue is not just about worldwide fair trade. There is also a local element. We are trying hard to make the link with Strathaven's farming traditions and use of local produce. As far as I know, we are the first Fairtrade group in Britain to include in its constitution support for local farming. The principle of fair pay for work applies as much to producers in Scotland as it does to producers anywhere else.

There are many different ways in which to change the world and to challenge the ways of the world. I feel that a commitment to fair trade throughout our country is one way of doing so. I hope that others will follow our initiative. While the developed world is talking about war, there are organisations and people all over the country whose principles and ethics have the potential to change the human condition across the world. I believe that those who are contented with their lives, have enough work and are fairly paid for that work have no real interest in going to war and killing other people.

I will finish with a quote that sums up everything that I want to say. At a time when we are sending £35 billion in aid to poor countries that lose £500 billion in unfair trade practices, I will quote the words of Isaías Martínez from Mexico, who says:

"We do not need charity, we are not beggars. If we are paid a reasonable price for our coffee, then we can do without charity."

17:15

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I congratulate Linda Fabiani on securing the debate. It is good that the Parliament has an opportunity during Fairtrade fortnight to discuss fair trade. Over the four-year lifespan of the session, the Parliament has had a good record of marking Fairtrade fortnight through events and motions—I plug my motion on the subject.

Several important issues need to be drawn out in the debate and they are connected with much of what was said in Angus MacKay's members' business debate on ethical investment last week. I repeat what I said then: it is vital that we take every opportunity that we can to use our purchasing power—be it individual, collective or corporate—to reflect our views and values as best we can. Supporting fair trade is the most obvious way in which we as consumers can do that.

I remember when Fairtrade products had limited availability and quality and people often tholed them on principle instead of choosing them for their taste. However, in the past decade or two, the situation has moved on dramatically. Fairtrade products are widely available and, in the main, there is a huge range of high-quality products to choose from.

It is important that the Parliament should continue to promote fair trade and that we should do all that we can as individuals to support Fairtrade products. We should congratulate and encourage the many local authorities that have supported and encouraged fair trade activities in different ways over the years.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Does Susan Deacon agree with me about the importance of cross-party working on Fairtrade initiatives? In the Lothians, West Lothian Council is working on a cross-party basis to support a steering group to ensure that Linlithgow becomes one of the earliest Fairtrade towns, if not the first or equal first. Cross-party initiatives in local authorities are important in pursuing such matters.

Susan Deacon: The former West Lothian District Council was my first employer, so I am more than happy to congratulate its successor council and to recognise the scope for cross-party working on fair trade and many related matters.

The Parliament is a good example of such working. It made early progress on ensuring that Fairtrade products were available in the canteen and in the members' lounge. Those steps are small, but practical. I am bound to note with regret that the Executive was perhaps not as quick off the mark to make such practical changes. Having reviewed some parliamentary answers recently, I think that there is probably some way to go. I am sure that the Parliament, too, could make more progress. I hope that the minister will tell us that moves are afoot. Fair trade is a valuable matter for us to continue to promote and I hope that all the parties will do so.

17:18

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Linda Fabiani on securing the debate. I spent the first 25 years of my life in Paisley, which is in my region and is as near to my home town as anywhere can be. Paisley is trying vigorously to qualify as a Fairtrade town. Last year, Renfrewshire Council supported the initiative and the provost of Renfrewshire appeared in his pyjamas in bed in a shop window eating Fairtrade food to make the point.

I draw the Parliament's attention to a little Fairtrade shop in Paisley. I attended the shop's opening as escort to my wife, who is an enthusiast

for fair trade, and I discovered that every other political party was represented, which shows how important uniting on the matter is. The shop is called Rainbow Turtle—I do not know the reason for the name. According to its constitution, the shop's purpose is to advance education by promoting awareness of Fairtrade goods and associated issues in the developing world among the widest possible public and to promote the purpose of charitable bodies that have similar objectives.

The shop sells a wide variety of Fairtrade goods, some from Traidcraft in Gateshead and others from many other sources. The promotion of global citizenship and international social justice—to which we would all subscribe—is among its educational purposes. The shop is completely staffed by volunteers from Tuesday to Saturday every week and has got off to a really good start in the past 12 months. Its founders are Liz and Phil Cotton, Kate Cox and Alison Patrick. A team backs them on the management committee and in the shop. Their initiative and sense of mission should be recorded.

That is all that I want to say. I crave the indulgence of members, as the fourth out of five Fairtrade events in my house is taking place this evening and I had better get there by 7 o'clock or I will be in deep trouble.

17:21

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Linda Fabiani on securing the debate.

I believe in fair trade. Publicity is a major aspect of such issues, because people should be made aware of conditions. Arguments for fair trade that have recently been advanced by the churches and other groups have done much to raise awareness of the fact that when we buy tea, coffee or a bar of chocolate in a shop, there might be unfairness at the end of the chain because of our perhaps slightly selfish desire to drag down prices. Such unfairness exists.

Linda Fabiani referred to Ghana; a year or so ago, I met a lady from Ghana who was trying to spread the word on the matter in question. It was interesting that she complained about the huge European fishing vessels that were appearing off the Ghanain coast, which were sucking up what people had seen over the years as being their traditional crop. That is a problem that we in Scotland perhaps face now. As a result of the infrastructure in Ghana, tomato producers could not compete with cheap imports from Italy, which is a modern and up-to-date country. Wage levels and other factors might suggest to somebody who is not terribly well informed that the tomato

producers should be able to sell their products much cheaper, but that is not the case. Many people in such countries find it hard to achieve a reasonable existence not only from their exports, but from what they sell at home.

I said that publicity is all important and I congratulate Aberfeldy and Strathaven on their publicity, which has created awareness. The conditions for a town's nomination or acceptance as a Fairtrade town do not seem to be too onerous. Other towns might hear about today's debate—although I am sad to see that few people are in the gallery to listen to it—and be made aware of those conditions. I say to Colin Campbell, however, that provosts of towns are not required to sit in shop windows in their pyjamas, although that seems to have been a good publicity stunt. As I said, the requirements are not too onerous and perhaps other towns in Scotland should follow the example that has been set by Aberfeldy and Strathaven.

17:24

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in the debate and I congratulate my colleague Linda Fabiani on securing it.

I want to bring the Aberfeldy perspective to the debate, because we have heard a great deal about Strathaven. I can confirm an exclusive story: the signs that appear at Aberfeldy's various entrances—I think that the town has four entrances—say that Aberfeldy is Scotland's first Fairtrade town. It must be first equal with Strathaven but, nonetheless, the fact that it is is very much appreciated in our local community.

I pay tribute to the work of the Aberfeldy Traidcraft Group, which has done so much to make possible Aberfeldy's participation in the venture. At a practical level, I thank Perth and Kinross Council for its assistance with signage. That council has received more letters from me than I care to remember, demanding signage for this, that and the next thing. I am pleased that on this occasion the council was able to respond so effectively.

Fairtrade fortnight has brought a number of interesting ventures into the locality. At Aberfeldy's Breadalbane Academy, which includes the primary school, the children have been selling Fairtrade sweets in the canteen; I do not know how that complies with the Executive's healthy eating project, but fair do's to them, anyway. A number of shops, including the Lurgan farm shop just outside Aberfeldy and the Co-operative Group supermarket—the main supermarket in the town—have been active in promoting Fairtrade products as a result of the venture. In many respects the venture brings together the work of communities,

individuals and organisations and provides a welcome opportunity to bind our local community.

The debate gives Parliament the opportunity to mark the significance of the contribution that is made by Fairtrade activity. Although the province of the Parliament is many domestic issues, there are ways in which our Parliament and our community can do something to link with the wider international community and register our concern for the welfare of those who are in less fortunate positions than we are in Scotland today. That symbol alone is an important product of this debate.

It says a great deal for the energy of volunteers—whether they are in Strathaven or in Aberfeldy—that the project has got off the ground and I wish it every success. I hope—to echo some of Susan Deacon's remarks—that the debate draws together, from all shades of opinion in the Parliament, all our productive and positive energies and that we express clearly that the Scottish Parliament is supportive of this way of thinking and that it wishes to encourage its spread and development within Scotland.

17:27

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): Fairtrade gave me one of my useful political lessons when the Gyle Centre held a Fairtrade promotion some years ago. For one of the inexplicable reasons why we all do funny things, a group was planting a tree. Assorted politicians, clergy, businesspeople and others were allowed to hang on to little bits of the tree. However, the really important man who planted the tree was a footballer: that put me in my place.

Linda Fabiani deserves great credit for securing the debate on her motion and for her obvious personal commitment to the cause.

I will concentrate on the consumerist angle. We all complain that we cannot get people interested in politics, but people get interested in issues such as this. A huge number of people became involved in a campaign on the related issue of cutting the debts of developing countries. We stood in a circle around Edinburgh Castle and people marched in Birmingham and many other places. Many people were enthused by the issue and their action had an effect on our Government's policy and its efforts to change the policies of other Governments.

We must try to get a similar thing going in relation to fair trade. Most Governments make warm noises about fair trade, but do not deliver. Protectionism is still an issue; the European Union is open to serious criticism, as is the United States of America and other countries. If we can mobilise consumers through activities such as having

Fairtrade towns, we will harness a great deal of energy and good will in ways that will greatly improve the world and the quality of life in this country. Who knows—some of the people who are involved in Fairtrade might even become interested in politics and start to kick us about the place.

The activities in relation to Fairtrade are welcome and we should work to encourage more and more people to take part in the campaign.

17:29

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I congratulate Linda Fabiani on her long commitment to fair trade. I agree with Susan Deacon's point that, many years ago, when people bought Fairtrade goods, they could not always eat them. I remember that when I bought such products, my children thought, "What is that?" Thankfully, things have moved on and the products are much better now.

Last week, I went to a Fairtrade shop in Dennistoun called GreenCity Wholefoods, which will celebrate its 25th year in business in May. I was amazed by the quality and quantity of the food that the shop sells and supplies to other shops in Glasgow and Scotland. That shows us how near to home Fairtrade products have come. Many years ago, people had to travel to get them, but now they are available in cities such as Glasgow.

A fair trade organisation has been operating for many years—we all know it as the Co-op. The principles of the Co-operative were basically the same as the present fair trade principles. I am not being flippant, but perhaps because there used to be Co-ops on every corner we took them for granted. The Co-op started the type of fair trade society that, I hope, will begin to emerge throughout Scotland and the world.

The issue is serious: it is about stopping the exploitation of people in what is called the third world. Such people want to make a decent living for their families and do not want to be exploited. I congratulate Linda Fabiani on the motion. If, by debating it and receiving answers from the minister on how, as Phil Gallie says, there can be better advertising of and a more positive spin put on fair trade, we will have achieved something.

The debate has done wonders and Parliament should be congratulated on accepting that something can be done about the exploitation of people in third-world countries. I hope that there will be more motions and answers from the Executive on fair trade and on the treatment of people throughout the world.

17:32

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I, too, congratulate Linda Fabiani on securing the debate and on her elegant contribution.

I was not a great expert on fair trade until I was eating my second hamburger at the Edderton parish church picnic last summer, when the minister's wife, Mrs Watt, fixed me with that eye that ministers' wives sometimes have and asked, "Where do you stand on fair trade?" I made appropriate noises, but that was not good enough because she wanted to know exactly what the Parliament was doing on fair trade. She sent me away to find out what the Parliament was doing about Fairtrade tea and coffee. She was right to put me on the spot because it made me think.

In my home town of Tain, the Co-op has a Fairtrade stand and I dare say that that has been replicated in other parts of Scotland.

Linda Fabiani: Two members have mentioned the Co-op. I point out that the Co-op has made a commitment that any cocoa that it uses in its products will be Fairtrade. That is to be commended.

Mr Stone: Absolutely right.

Sandra White is also correct that Fairtrade products do not get the response, "Yuck mummy, what is that?"—they are good stuff. Linda Fabiani mentioned honey, tea and coffee, but I want to mention the excellent wine that can be bought at Fairtrade stands. Last week, I bought a box of it and found it extremely good; the only trouble was that the box finished rather sooner than I would have liked. I will buy another one as soon as I get home.

Donald Gorrie was right to talk about people power. Fairtrade products appeal to ordinary people in a way that many other things do not. It increases one's faith in the goodness of humanity when people say that they care about fair trade and buy the products. Those people are not only from the chattering classes; people from all walks of life go to the stand in the Co-op.

When Linda Fabiani, John Home Robertson and I eventually finish the magnificent new building at the end of the royal mile, we can assume that, after David McLetchie's comments this afternoon, the Conservative offices will be somewhere in the basement and next to the garage. My serious point is that the Parliament and the Executive are doing a certain amount, but we can do more. I hope that there will come a day when lots of Fairtrade products are eaten in our canteens and dining rooms and sold in the Parliament shop.

Why do we have only a Fairtrade fortnight and why are only some shops involved? We must

move on and go for the ultimate aim of making Fairtrade products available 365 days a year. What we are doing is a start. As members were speaking Gaelic earlier, let me say this: togar càrn mòr de chlachan beaga—from small stones a mighty cairn is built. In concluding with those words in Gaelic, I have guaranteed myself a brown envelope from the official report.

17:35

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Listening to the speeches so far, I have heard clear themes coming through about harnessing energy and good will and linking local action with international co-operation by individuals and families acting for the benefit of all. That is the kind of world that we should be building. I congratulate Linda Fabiani on initiating the debate and I congratulate Strathaven and Aberfeldy on becoming Scotland's first Fairtrade towns. In a friendly rivalry for the good of people throughout the world, the towns of Angus are striving to join those towns in having that status.

As a member of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, I am happy to report that the SPCB and the officials who advise us have ensured that, from the start, Fairtrade products have been available in our canteen and have been served at meetings and functions that have been held throughout the Parliament. As a long-time consumer of Fairtrade products, I welcome this opportunity to raise awareness of the products and what they represent.

International trade may seem a remote issue, but when commodity prices fall dramatically, that has a catastrophic impact on the lives of millions of small-scale producers, forcing many of them into crippling debt and causing countless others to lose their land and their homes. A recent television news report focused on the current situation in Nicaragua, which has been caused by the fall in trading prices for coffee beans in the world market. That fall in prices has meant that workers on the coffee estates who, at present, are paid a pittance for their back-breaking labour face outright unemployment. The report showed harrowing scenes of malnutrition in babies and young children whose parents could barely afford to feed them, as well as distress among mothers and fathers who were afraid that they would soon not be able to cope at all. The one hope for the situation that was highlighted in the news report was the intervention of Fairtrade to ensure that the price that was paid for the coffee beans was above the world market price, thereby allowing the people to continue to make a living.

Today, as a result of sales to the UK Fairtrade market, more than 500,000 farmers and workers throughout Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa

and Asia benefit from the better deal that the Fairtrade mark guarantees. Fairtrade sales are increasing every year and benefiting more people, and Fairtrade fortnight gives us all an opportunity to increase those sales further by convincing new consumers that Fairtrade foods not only guarantee a better deal for third-world producers but taste great and are available in a wide range of quality products.

In my constituency, the Arbroath Fairtrade group has worked hard to raise awareness of Fairtrade products, and I commend it for the excellent initiatives that it has undertaken. The group will use this year's Fairtrade fortnight to good effect. Ultimately, it seeks to make Arbroath Scotland's next Fairtrade town, a goal that recently came a step closer to being achieved when Angus Council passed a resolution supporting Fairtrade and agreeing to use goods carrying the Fairtrade mark when catering for council meetings and functions. I declare an interest, as my wife, Councillor Sheena Welsh, moved the successful resolution. I attended the recent Fairtrade breakfast, along with Arbroath councillors and church representatives, and I wish the Arbroath Fairtrade action group continued success in its work and look forward to Arbroath and other Angus towns achieving Fairtrade town status.

By altering our purchasing habits very slightly, and by taking action as individuals and in our churches, schools, councils, Parliament and—as the debate has highlighted—towns, we can all make a huge difference by positively improving the lives of people elsewhere in the world. If we do that, we can extend the principles of fair trade in Scotland and ensure that, as a country, we are doing our part for third-world producers, wherever they are.

17:39

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): I congratulate Linda Fabiani on lodging the motion. The Executive welcomes the opportunity to be represented in this important debate. I also congratulate Strathaven and Aberfeldy. In Strathaven, we are generous enough to allow our signs to say “along with Aberfeldy”. I am happy to donate to John Swinney a can of paint and a paintbrush so that we can sort out the signs in Aberfeldy.

Mr Swinney: As an uncosted commitment.

Mr Kerr: Out of my own pocket, John—not from public money.

Members have talked about the desire of towns and villages throughout Scotland to do the same, and we recognise that contribution. I am particularly pleased that my home town of Strathaven has been included.

I can bring another aspect to the debate. For example, when I am shopping in the Co-op with the kids we get into a discussion about what fair trade means. Young people have valuable discussions about the Fairtrade logo and Fairtrade products. Young children do not automatically understand what fair trade is about, but it is possible to explain, in a few straightforward words, what fair trade is and why it is important.

I congratulate the Strathaven committee members—to whom Linda Fabiani referred—on their hard work. As well as the volunteers' role, the council's role is also to be welcomed. Local Strathaven churches also run interesting Fairtrade schemes. I have visited them and seen the good work that goes on.

I share with Susan Deacon and others memories of tholing Fairtrade products, such as Nicaraguan coffee. It was sometimes hard going, but it was worth while. The quality of Fairtrade products has improved. Other members referred to other important aspects. It seems that behind every SNP MSP who spoke in the debate, such as Colin Campbell and Andrew Welsh, there is a good lady who organises things back at the ranch. On the vision of Donald Gorrie in a tree—I am just not going to go there, although it is an interesting concept.

Jamie Stone and Andrew Welsh referred to the fact that the small things that we do can make a big difference. I think that the underlying message of fair trade is about the ability to make a small contribution by buying a Fairtrade product, which has a substantial impact on the lives of the producers. Linda Fabiani's motion has given us the chance to focus on Fairtrade fortnight, but we acknowledge that we want such a focus to continue beyond a fortnight.

As members will be aware, the regulation of international trade and international development assistance is a reserved matter, but I could not let the debate pass without putting on the record my acknowledgement of the good work that has been done by Gordon Brown and Clare Short on international trade matters that deal with fair trade, third-world debt and so on.

We welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. I will point out later what the Executive seeks to do about fair trade schemes, which can and do make a difference, not least in raising awareness of the often difficult circumstances that small producers face. Andrew Welsh referred to the fact that the price of coffee beans in conventional markets recently fell to a 30-year low. However, under fair trade schemes, coffee producers get prices that are at least two-and-a-half times higher than those in conventional markets. That can help us to understand the difference that we can make to the lives of those

producers, many of whom are the poorest people in the world.

Fair trade schemes, importantly, provide consumers with choice. According to the Fairtrade Foundation, Café Direct is now the sixth largest coffee brand. That is a phenomenal fact, considering where it all started many years ago.

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): The minister heard from members about the excellent track record of the Scottish Parliament in promoting fair trade. However, the Scottish Executive has enormous purchasing power. I asked two parliamentary questions on the issue in November 2001, but I was disappointed to be told that the Executive does not take into account the purchasing policies of its outside catering contractors, nor the choice of fair trade in its own purchasing policy. Will the minister consider that, so that the Scottish Government can play more of a role in promoting fair trade?

Mr Kerr: I will deal with that point later and I hope that it will be worth waiting for.

In 2001-02 alone, £45 million was spent in the UK on fair trade foods. Internationally, 4.5 million growers and their families, in 36 countries, benefit from selling their goods through fair trade schemes. In choosing to buy Fairtrade products, we make a small contribution to helping the poorest families of the world.

Businesses and other organisations also have a part to play. As corporate social responsibility moves up the business agenda, many public and private sector organisations are getting involved in the fair trade debate, which is to be welcomed. For example, Strathaven and Aberfeldy have done so and I am sure that further Scottish towns will get involved. I wish every success to those towns that seek to become Fairtrade towns. Satisfying the five criteria requires not only shops to put the products on their shelves, but communities to buy them, organise committees and do work in schools. My family has been involved in such work, which creates a supportive environment for fair trade.

Susan Deacon and Richard Lochhead asked what the Executive is doing about fair trade. In 2001, we introduced a choice of Fairtrade coffee in the staff restaurants in two of our main buildings, St Andrew's House and Pentland House. We introduced a Fairtrade option for coffee that is served at official meetings and staff can request Fairtrade coffee when ordering hospitality.

However, by the end of April 2003 we will have introduced Fairtrade tea and coffee options in all the Executive's staff restaurants. We have also asked our catering contractor to ensure that all tea and coffee provided at official meetings is bought under a recognised fair trade label or equivalent.

In other words, we will be changing our policy as a result of bringing attention to these matters.

We recognise the lobbying and work that is going on to this end throughout Scotland. In recognition of Fairtrade fortnight, we have arranged for the display of promotional posters in Executive canteens and promotional stands in all staff restaurants next week. That will allow people to sample products, dispelling the myth about poor quality and allowing Executive employees to take part in Fairtrade purchasing and tasting.

To return to the substance of the motion, the Executive believes that it is right, especially in Fairtrade fortnight, that the Parliament should pay tribute to the individuals and organisations in Strathaven and Aberfeldy, and to others who are now campaigning for their towns to become Fairtrade towns. As the motion suggests, we should also recognise the important part played by South Lanarkshire, Perth and Kinross councils.

Finally, I congratulate Linda Fabiani on bringing this matter to the attention of the Parliament. I wish all towns in Scotland every success with Fairtrade fortnight, and beyond.

Meeting closed at 17:47.

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