

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 6 October 2005

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 6 October 2005

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

Scottish Economy

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-3377, in the name of Jim Mather, on the Scottish economy.

09:15

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): This is the first economic debate since the publication of the 1974 McCrone report and the pace of political evolution continues apace. This week, 90 per cent of the members of the Catalan Parliament supported a new statute of autonomy, which is in effect a claim of right to the nationhood of Catalonia and a demand for tax powers and for the creation of a Catalan inland revenue. Meanwhile, the Tories have tabled their so-called “plans” for what they deem “fiscal autonomy”. That is a matter to which I will return.

On Monday night, the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning admitted on BBC radio that there are significant problems in business growth and other aspects of our economy and he called for consensus. Well, for the record, John Swinney and I made a similar call on 3 September 2003 and Wendy Alexander did the same in her book, “Chasing the Tartan Tiger”, which was published the next day. Yet such consensus looks a long way off—we are well short of the 90 per cent support that was achieved in Barcelona. We must ask ourselves why that is. Although I accept that many people in other parties genuinely want the best for Scotland, views remain polarised.

Public opinion has been solidly in favour of more powers for the Parliament since 1999, but the parties in power have failed to heed that mood. I recognise that several leading Liberal Democrat MSPs and some Labour politicians have appeared open to the idea of more powers for the Parliament, but none of them has been forceful or courageous enough to progress that. It looks as though Lib Dem members have been motivated by their desire to stay in government and to avoid giving sustenance to a Scottish National Party argument. Labour politicians in that category—by and large the bright ones who are not in ministerial office—have been inhibited by old loyalties and the rigours of reselection.

The greatest obstacle to achieving political consensus on a workable basis is the fact that for

many it would mean admitting that the SNP has been right all along. Nevertheless, the signs are there that the process is under way. The Catalan statute of autonomy helps. The 1974 McCrone report helps. Nicol Stephen’s call for consensus helps. Even this week’s call by the Tories for more fiscal autonomy helps, although I can see little sign that the Tory measures would improve Scottish competitiveness. Like many of my generation, I am cynical about Tory promises. We remember the turbo-devolution promised by Alec Douglas-Home and John Major’s “taking stock”.

Most of us will never buy the false hope of a better future from those who are willing only to tinker with a failed model. The people of Scotland are already forming an orderly queue to reject the Tories’ proposals, with their uncertain timeframe, their desire for the long grass of consultation, the lack of detail and the bland acceptance that nothing can be done on corporation tax.

The view that the model on which Scotland’s economy has been run is a failure is bolstered and highlighted by a piece of counter-history that SNP researchers have carried out since the publication of the McCrone report. They have calculated what the outcome would have been if the Scottish economy had grown at the Norwegian rate for the past 30 years. The result is astounding. Instead of bumping along the bottom with the lowest growth rate in Europe for that entire period, gross domestic product would have been £46 billion—or 59 per cent—higher than the current level and average incomes would have been £11,779 per annum higher.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Is Jim Mather prepared to accept that that is not what the McCrone report says? Indeed, the report appears to say that Scotland’s economy would have overheated and possibly collapsed under those circumstances.

Jim Mather: It is intriguing how McCrone and the Tories can take a godsend and make it a curse.

Given that an extra £18 billion of income per annum would have been generated, it is easy to see how, over those 30 years, we could have accumulated the £100 billion that the Norwegians have in their oil fund for future generations. In addition, that economic climate would have created greater life expectancy, a higher population, a better demographic structure, a better ratio of private to public sector employment and a quality of service and infrastructure that would have boosted our competitiveness.

The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon): How would the SNP create that oil fund given that there has been a deficit for the

past 15 years? Would it take out an overdraft to fund the surplus?

Jim Mather: I hear George Lyon, in his new ministerial role, talking Scotland down at an early opportunity. It is absolutely incredible. He is also talking down the business of the Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS and Standard Life, because statistics put our national viability at 55th out of 60 developed and developing countries. George Lyon is undermining the key component of our economy. It is a black stain on his record.

We have a second chance, because oil, renewable energy and the dynamics of the global economy suit small, capable countries such as ours. We have plenty role models. Even Catalonia—the location of cheap holidays when I was a lad—has a GDP per capita per annum £4,000 higher than ours. Negotiations are under way for Catalonia to move even further forward. The Finns, under the shadow of the Soviet Union for so long—that big neighbour that inhibited its growth—now tops the world competitiveness league table.

The people continue to want more powers and our opponents are blinking. We are about to have a majority of party leaders in the chamber wanting more power for the Parliament. Three of the past four enterprise ministers want more powers for the Parliament. The previous two chief executives of Scottish Enterprise want more powers for the Parliament. That is what convinces me that we will get the consensus that we want and that that consensus will be based largely on the SNP's proposition.

The challenge is to convince the majority of people. If the foregoing words are not enough, I ask members to ponder on this. W Edwards Deming, one of the world's foremost quality gurus and the guy who turned round the economy of Japan, developed a theory called the 85:15 rule. The rule is that 85 per cent of organisational problems are caused by system failures, poor plans or procedures, a lack of measurable performance criteria and poor processes, whereas only 15 per cent are caused by people. Deming and others established that the potential for eliminating problems lies primarily in improving the system, not in blaming employees.

However, current research indicates that that 85 per cent may be fallacious; the proportion might be 95 per cent or 97 per cent. The poor people of Scotland, therefore, who are struggling to make ends meet, struggling to get a job and struggling to move forward, and who blame themselves and suffer low self-esteem, need to consider the Government and the failed system, the proof of which is staring us in the face day in, day out. If that proof does not constitute a sufficient basis to

generate consensus, it will deliver a working majority for the SNP.

I move,

That the Parliament accepts that it is the duty of government to create conditions that foster meaningful levels of economic growth and result in rising living standards, increased life expectancy and a growing demographically balanced population; regrets the fact that the policies of the last 30 years have failed to meet this test, and believes that the time is now right for the Scottish Parliament to exercise full competitive control of the Scottish economy in order to achieve these objectives.

09:23

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): What part of the 85:15 theory would account for the SNP's absolute failure to excite the population over its economic strategy? Mr Mather says that the people of Scotland are queueing up to endorse his position. He could have fooled me. As members will appreciate, I do not have much sympathy for the nationalists or their current plight. They are languishing behind even our Liberal Democrat partners in the popularity stakes and are completely incapable of securing the trust or confidence of the people of Scotland. With all due respect, we have just seen one of the reasons why. It is a largely self-inflicted phenomenon, which is down to the absolute failure of the nationalists to articulate a credible or even vaguely plausible economic policy to challenge our management of Scotland's resources.

Jim Mather: Will the minister take an intervention?

Allan Wilson: Let me develop the point first.

The most recent attempt was Nicola Sturgeon's bizarre—indeed, economically illiterate—call for economic patriotism, whatever that may be. Equally bizarre, it must be said, was the resurrection of the 1970s slogan, "It's oor oil," or words to that effect. That will not substitute for a complete lack of a monetary, fiscal or exchange rate policy and the absence of any strategy for combating inflation, securing full employment and growing the economy more generally. The SNP instead adopted the one policy that for years in the chamber did not dare speak its name: so-called independence. Its members have substituted slogans for strategy.

Jim Mather: Having heard everything that the minister has to say, may I suggest to him that he be courageous enough to join me in debating the Scottish economy in front of an audience of real businesspeople and that he have the patriotism to do the right thing by Scottish Power?

Allan Wilson: I strove for a Scottish Parliament so that we could debate these matters in a forum

of public opinion. People such as Jim Mather stood on the sidelines, refused to join the constitutional convention and did nothing. I remember the SNP's leader across the water accusing the Scottish Labour Party of being incapable of delivering a pizza. Instead, we delivered the Parliament, where we properly debate the issues that matter to our nation.

I am happy to talk about Scotland's oil anytime, anywhere. Interestingly enough, "It's our oil" does not even make it into the motion. Perhaps that is an early indication that that slogan is going the way of its predecessor. The McCrone report is 30 years old. It is an interesting period piece. However, figures from "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland 2002-03" show categorically that, as my colleague George Lyon pointed out—Mr Mather steadfastly refused to answer his point—even if oil revenues were apportioned to Scotland, our position would remain one of net borrowing compared with the rest of the United Kingdom. The oil fund that the SNP boasts about would be, as George Lyon said, an oil overdraft.

GERS also includes an analysis of longer-term developments and provides evidence of a long-term structural net fiscal deficit in Scotland. I notice that oil only becomes "our oil" when the price is high. The economic illiteracy of tying our economy to the fluctuating price of one world commodity is ludicrous. The effect on our currency and exchange rate, measured against a basket of other international currencies, would be disastrous for this country's manufacturing exports. The whisky industry, on which so many Scots rely for employment, springs to mind. To face the challenges of a globalising world—

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP)
rose—

Allan Wilson: Perhaps Mr Swinney will let me explain my point; this is a debate and I have already given way to his front-bench colleague. If Mr Swinney had stayed on the front bench, I might have given way to him.

Our commitment to securing sustainable economic growth includes working to ensure that all parts of Scotland benefit from our policies to improve transport connections, to reform the planning system and to secure a smart, successful Scotland. We are committed to securing economic and social regeneration throughout Scotland. We have made good progress under devolution, but we have more to do in growing our cities and urban communities and in regenerating our former coalfield and deindustrialised areas. That is a challenge in which all our agencies have a major role to play in working together to build a better Scotland.

People could choose SNP instability over stability; they could choose unemployment over employment; they could choose perpetual constitutional navel-gazing and the infamous, never-ending referendum over the settled will of the Scottish people; and they could choose a flight of capital, inward or indigenous, from these shores over investor confidence. However, I have confidence that the people of Scotland will not choose those options. We in the Executive are with the grain of the Scottish people; the nationalists are not and never will be.

I move amendment S2M-3377.2, to leave out from "create conditions" to end and insert:

"help create the conditions that foster a sustainable economy, rising living standards and an improving quality of life and welcomes the commitment of the Scottish Executive to sustainable economic growth, record levels of investment in public infrastructure and transport connections, its support for competitive business, skills development, training and education, and its promotion of Scotland as a vibrant place to live, work and do business."

09:30

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the SNP for allocating some of its business time to the economy. There is no more important subject that the Parliament could discuss today. If any members are sceptical about that, I simply remind them that, without a strong, stable, wealth-generating economy, we could not deliver the quality public services that we all want.

Economic debates in the Parliament are sometimes surreal. Although the primary duty of virtually all Parliaments is to manage the national wealth through the raising and allocation of revenue, our Parliament has no such duty. On the contrary, the Executive is merely an agent of the Treasury—it has been assigned the task of spending money that it has not earned. That means that the Executive has little or no accountability for the money that it spends. It also means that it has presided over a growth in the public sector that is starting to damage our economy, a point that was acknowledged as recently as yesterday by the chairman of Scottish Enterprise, Sir John Ward.

I welcome much of the spending that was outlined in the Executive's budget—indeed, I would like to see more spending on areas such as road building. However, the overriding conclusion from any study of the Executive's spending plans is that vast sums of money are being squandered on waste and bureaucracy. That is damaging our economic health, because the public sector has become so large that it is crowding out the private investment that we need.

The proof is in the figures: zero growth in the first quarter of this year; significantly lower levels

of entrepreneurship and business start-ups than in the rest of the UK; 100,000 manufacturing jobs lost since 1997, with figures that came out yesterday showing a further fall to a 10-year low; and a fall of four places in the UK regional competitiveness index from fourth in 1997—under a Conservative Government—to eighth in 2005.

Those are not just statistics; they are figures that matter in the lives of ordinary Scots. They tell us that the small businessmen and businesswomen and entrepreneurs in our constituencies are struggling to cope and that the Executive has failed, in the words of the SNP motion,

“to create conditions that foster meaningful levels of economic growth”.

What should the Parliament be doing? The SNP’s solution, as outlined in Mr Mather’s motion, is that the Parliament should have

“full competitive control of the Scottish economy”—

or, in normal speak, independence. That would be a disaster not only for the economy, but for Scotland as a whole. We Conservatives believe that there is a debate to be had about the fiscal powers of the Parliament. However, we understand that the massive constitutional upheaval that tearing Scotland from the United Kingdom would entail would be a futile distraction from the action that we can take here and now to help our businesspeople and entrepreneurs.

Worse than that, the SNP’s approach lets the Executive off the hook. By talking about the need for constitutional change, the SNP suggests that nothing can be done now to turn around our economic underperformance. There is much that the Executive could and should be doing today with the powers that it already has.

Jim Mather: What level of increase in economic growth does the member anticipate that the measures outlined in his amendment would generate?

Murdo Fraser: I am not going to set a target for them. However, it is entirely possible that growth in the Scottish economy could at least match that of the other parts of the United Kingdom; indeed, it should exceed that if we gave Scotland a competitive advantage. The important point is that the Executive already has the necessary powers. We do not need constitutional change to bring about improvements. That is the difference between our view and the SNP’s. We are happy to look at the whole question of the powers of the Parliament and how we might use them to deliver competitive advantage for Scotland, but we believe that the Executive should be using the powers that it already has—it could use them today without waiting for that process of constitutional change.

What would we do? First, we would bring forward the cut in business rates. Later today, the Parliament will hear an announcement of the timing of the cut. It has been too long since there was uniform poundage and it is time that something was done.

The Executive needs to tackle the problems of excess regulation and red tape. Every Executive department should be tasked with scouring the statute book for every regulation that is of no proven worth or is in need of abolition. That would allow small businessmen and businesswomen to spend more time on their work and less time on Government forms.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Example?

Murdo Fraser: Mr Rumbles asks for an example; I will give him one. The Executive is consulting on proposals to introduce regulations that will require small businesses to undergo an annual inspection of private water supplies. That will put a substantial burden on small businesses in rural areas; it is completely unnecessary and exactly the sort of burden that we should be scrapping. I see that Mr Rumbles is nodding.

We can go further. We should privatise Scottish Water and help to bring down the costs, making the situation more competitive for business. We should also invest in our roads network.

We must reject the SNP’s failed tonic because we can take action today, within the devolved settlement, to help our businesses and to revive economic growth.

I move amendment S2M-3377.1, to leave out from “regrets” to end and insert:

“notes, however, that under the stewardship of the Scottish Executive economic growth has consistently trailed that of the United Kingdom; believes that independence would be a costly and unwelcome distraction from the concrete action that can be taken within the devolved framework to boost economic growth, and therefore urges the Executive to cut red tape, privatise Scottish Water, increase investment in transport and cut business rates at the earliest possible opportunity.”

09:36

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I offer my apologies to the chamber for being slightly late this morning.

I read the SNP publication “Scotland in Surplus: The Economic Platform for Independence” with great interest. Believe it or not, for some years of my life I served as a private soldier in the Territorial Army—not with particular distinction, but I wore the Queen’s uniform. The issue of defence in the SNP paper is particularly interesting and we have to pose some questions to the SNP about it.

However, I will first quote from the paper "Our policies for defence", on SNP.org.uk. It says:

"The priority of the Scottish Defence Services (SDS), in partnership with Scotland's neighbours and allies, will be to safeguard our land, sea and air space."

That means an army, a navy and an air force. The document expresses other laudable sentiments. For example, it says:

"Defence policy should be made in Scotland's national parliament."

That is fair enough, if we support the Scottish National Party, and I look forward to hearing its comments on that in its summing up. The document goes on to say:

"Scotland's armed services should be well-remunerated, equipped and trained."

That might mean that they should be remunerated, equipped and trained better than they are at the moment—I do not know. We are then told:

"Military facilities, including strategic airforce stations should not be downsized at the present time."

That poses a very interesting question. We also hear Margaret Ewing saying, quite rightly, that the bases in her constituency should be kept open. However, what does that mean? I will return to that.

When I served in the second 51st Highland Volunteers, it was an infantry regiment. When the SNP talks about saving the regiments—something that my party also talks about—we have to remember that we are not just talking about one regiment or six regiments; we are also talking about all the back-up functions for those regiments.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mr Stone: I will give way to Mr Neil in a moment.

We cannot have an army that consists merely of infantry, because it needs other functions to back it up. I am thinking of engineers, light armour, heavy armour, artillery, intelligence—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Stone, I assume that you are talking about the impact on a local economy.

Mr Stone: I am. We are debating the SNP's economic policy and I argue that the economics of an independent Scotland are greatly governed and dictated by what will be spent on defence.

Alex Neil: Will the member give way now?

Mr Stone: I will, but perhaps Mr Neil would like to tell us a little bit about the other functions that are necessary for defence.

Alex Neil: Does the member agree that, if Scotland was independent, we would not have been part of the illegal and immoral war in Iraq? An independent Scotland would have saved £1 billion, which could have been made available for peacekeeping and getting rid of hunger in the world, instead of for butchering people in Iraq.

Mr Stone: I congratulate Mr Neil on quoting my party's policy.

We need clear answers on what the SNP means by defence—perhaps Mr Stevenson could give us them. What about bases such as Rosyth and Kinloss? Are they to be paid for out of the Scottish exchequer or budget, or will an English air force, army and navy take up temporary residence in an independent Scotland?

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I never resist temptation. Will the member tell us what share of the United Kingdom's defence expenditure is spent in Scotland? We already have an army, navy and air force. We already pay for them, but we get little benefit.

Alex Johnstone: Not through the block grant.

Mr Stone: Not through the block grant—I quote my Tory colleague. I have the SNP's figures on defence.

The issue is pertinent to the debate and the SNP has to come clean and give some serious answers. If I say nothing else in this debate, I will say that. The SNP has to think carefully about the issue because, until it answers such questions, it will have a major credibility gap. I support the amendment in the minister's name.

The Presiding Officer: These short debates constrain argument, but I have to ask members to stick to four minutes in the open debate.

09:40

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): I quote from John Horgan who, when writing about Sean Lemass, said:

"History is always to some extent what we make it, an attempt by the present generation to take possession of the past and to use it as a route map to the future."

This is the first opportunity that we have had to debate in the chamber the revelations in the McCrone document. Notwithstanding what Mr Johnstone seems to think, the paper did not appear to indicate that independence would be a disaster for Scotland, and it shows how our economy could be transformed. We can look back and compare the 30 years that we have wasted with what other nations have done. Some of those nations, such as Norway, have been blessed with oil, and others have succeeded without the benefit of oil, but all have put us to shame, and we have

the opportunity now to decide where we go. We have wasted 30 years and there is no reason why we should waste another 30 years.

It is no wonder that the McCrone document was marked as secret when it contains quotations such as:

"This paper has shown that the advent of North Sea oil has completely overturned the traditional economic arguments used against Scottish nationalism. An independent Scotland could now expect to have massive surplus both on its budget and on its balance of payments and with the proper husbanding of resources this situation could last for a very long time into the future."

It goes on to the killer quote, which is:

"Thus, for the first time since the Act of Union was passed, it can now be credibly argued that Scotland's economic advantage lies in its repeal. When this situation comes to be fully appreciated in the years ahead, it is likely to have a major impact on Scottish politics."

No wonder they tried to keep the document secret. However, we had to go through unmitigated Thatcherism and the devastation that it wreaked upon our communities.

Allan Wilson: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr MacAskill: The minister has had his opportunity. When the First Minister said that he was waffling, at least he had the good grace to sit down; the minister should learn from that.

Mr Johnstone should note what the document says about the only thing that the SNP got wrong:

"Thus, all that is wrong now with the SNP estimate is that it is far too low; there is a prospect of Government oil revenues in 1980 that could greatly exceed the present Government revenue in Scotland from all sources and could even be comparable in size to the whole of the Scottish national income in 1970."

All of that was kept from us and what we got from Mr Wilson's colleagues and, indeed, from other political parties was the prediction first that all the oil and gas would be gone by the 1980s, then that it would all be gone by the 1990s and then that it would all be gone by the start of the new millennium. Now we know that there are 30, 40 or 50 years of oil and gas left.

We now have further revelations—it is not oilgate but mediagate. The Government was so frightened and intimidated by a television programme that it decided to interfere. When a Government starts to interfere with and distort the media, it fundamentally subverts the democratic process. Harry Ewing MP, from the Labour Government, is quoted as saying that the programme that the BBC proposed to transmit before the 1977 district elections was

"serious enough indeed, to warrant intervention by the Government at the most Senior Level."

Ewing described the proposed timing of the programmes as

"absolutely devastating in that they will be screened just prior to the District Council elections in Scotland. There can be absolutely no doubt that their effect on the outcome of the District Council elections will be to say the least quite disastrous, not only for the Labour Party but for other political parties in Scotland as well."

No wonder that there was Labour and Tory unity to do down the SNP, as the headline in today's edition of *The Herald* suggests. Had that been done at Westminster by a Labour Government to a Tory Opposition or by a Tory Government to a Labour Opposition, there would have been outrage. It would have been viewed as Sovietesque tactics—something fit for a banana republic. We now know that our oil wealth has been hidden from us and that those in the pan-unionist coalition that has acted against the interests of Scotland colluded not just to do down the SNP but to subvert the democratic process in Scotland. Thankfully, we still have oil left. When we form the Administration, we will ensure that it is used for the benefit of the people of Scotland, not for Thatcherite policies and to subsidise mass unemployment.

09:45

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): This is an instance of the old songs not necessarily being the best ones. Last week's election results underlined the political ineptitude of the SNP. This morning's debate highlights the extent to which it is completely out of touch with the interests and aspirations of the people of Scotland. People are not interested in what happened 30 years ago. They are interested in what happens now and what should happen in the future—how their economic prospects and personal interests can be advanced.

Let us be absolutely clear: for 18 of the past 20 years, oil revenues would not have covered the level of public expenditure in Scotland, even on the most optimistic assumption. Public expenditure in Scotland is 20 to 25 per cent higher than that south of the border. Unlike the SNP and the Conservatives, I believe that that is a good thing. Ever since my election, I have worked hard to overcome the barriers that have held back the people of Clydebank from participating fully in the tremendous economic success that the UK and Scotland as part of that dynamic economy have enjoyed. I have campaigned for regeneration of the site of the former John Brown shipyard, to bring new life, better housing and more jobs to the centre of the town that I represent. I have campaigned for measures to be taken to improve health, bearing in mind the legacy of poor diet and unhealthy lifestyles that is at the root of the mortality and morbidity statistics that affect so

much of the west of Scotland. I have campaigned to improve educational standards, given the low proportion of people from West Dunbartonshire who go on to higher education.

In each of the areas that I have mentioned, we have made tremendous progress. The regeneration of the Clydebank waterfront is going on apace, generating real confidence and commitment among the people of the town. The unused private hospital that was built under the Tories has been brought into the national health service, making a terrific contribution to the reduction of waiting lists. It is now to become the flagship centre in Scotland for cardiac care. Clydebank is to have new secondary schools and a new college, so that its young people can have the best facilities available to build on the fact that this year West Dunbartonshire showed the most improvement in exam performance of any local authority in Scotland. All those developments depend on public expenditure, which both the SNP and the Tories seem in general to regard as a bad thing.

Most people in Scotland want to ensure that they get the investment in their area and community that will drive the economy forward and make things better for them. It is crucial that public expenditure is well spent and well used. It must focus on the interests of ordinary people, so that they get the chance to participate. That is what an opportunity society is all about, and the Labour Party is determined to deliver that for people. We are not interested in highfalutin' economic theories that do not mean anything, debates that may have taken place 30 years ago or conspiracies of the past. We are interested in what happens now, what is good for the people of Scotland and what is good for the people in the communities that we represent. That is what is crucial in politics.

Murdo Fraser: When the chairman of Scottish Enterprise says that the economy of parts of the west of Scotland is like that of eastern Europe, does that make the member proud of the Executive's record?

Des McNulty: It raises questions about what Scottish Enterprise should be doing for the towns and cities of the west of Scotland and how its work can be advanced. I hope that ministers will take up that issue steadily. However, I ask Murdo Fraser what Tory chancellor in England would create a situation in which the Conservatives could argue that there should be tax cuts paid for by tax transfers. The Tories are ending up in a fundamentally implausible position.

The question that we must ask is how, collectively, we can advance the interests of the people of Scotland and of economic growth and social conditions in Scotland, because the two are intertwined. The Parliament must focus particularly

on the interests of west-central Scotland—not just Clydebank and Ayrshire, which the minister represents, but Glasgow and the towns around it. That is where we need to work to unlock the opportunities and potential of our people. I am fed up with SNP and Conservative members arguing against the advancement of the west of Scotland because they have pet schemes elsewhere. We must argue for the whole of Scotland, but we must argue particularly for those areas in which the people are, the deprivation is and the growth potential is the greatest. The west of Scotland must be the top priority for the future.

09:51

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): It is clear that the publication of Gavin McCrone's report has given some in the SNP a chance to go into retro mode—to go back to the oil dreams of the 1970s. We must be clear about the fact that basing the future of Scotland's economy on North sea oil is like some imaginary SNP finance spokesperson of the 1850s proposing to base Scotland's economy on whale oil and finest blubber.

Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): Has the member ever heard of Norway? It is a country slightly to the north and east of us that has based its economy on the discovery of North sea oil and gas. Norway is now the most successful country in the world and the best place in which to live. It has been recognised as such for years. What is imaginary about that?

Mark Ballard: In the environment section of its manifesto, the SNP talks about how it will climate proof its policies. However, when it comes to the economic section, it talks as if oil is the future of Scotland's economy. That is the problem.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mark Ballard: I have already taken an intervention from an SNP member.

Future generations will boggle at the amount of oil and other precious hydrocarbons that we have and the amount of them that we have burned, given the huge variety of things that can be done with hydrocarbons. They will boggle at the impact of climate change. Hopefully, they will realise that we cannot base any economy on continuing to burn oil at the current rate and that we cannot base the economy of Scotland on continuing to pump oil over all else.

I agree with Jim Mather on the need for us to have more control over the Scottish economy. I was one of the MSPs who attended the Scottish Enterprise briefing yesterday morning. Unlike many MSPs, I listened to the litany of woe from Scottish Enterprise on the state of the Scottish

economy. Labour members often criticise Jim Mather for being a doom monger on the Scottish economy, but what he says is nothing compared with what we heard from Scottish Enterprise. Scottish Enterprise representatives talked in airy terms about the fact that Scotland had lost its advantage in wind energy generation to Norway, as if Scottish Enterprise was not there when that happened. We may now lose our advantage in wave energy generation to Portugal, unless we get the proper investment in research and development to take forward that industry.

I share Des McNulty's concerns about the role of Scottish Enterprise in regenerating the deprived communities of Scotland. We need a Parliament with the powers to make a difference to the Scottish economy and to build a sustainable economy for Scotland.

I am pleased that Allan Wilson's amendment refers to the need to

"foster a sustainable economy, rising living standards and an improving quality of life",

but I would like to tempt the minister to explain what he means by "a sustainable economy". Does it simply mean that increases in GDP will be sustained year on year, without any reference to social or environmental sustainability, or does the Executive want a truly sustainable economy—a wider vision of the economy? Recently we heard that almost half of all Scots and almost a quarter of all Scottish households live on less than £10,000 a year. Is that socially sustainable?

Scotland emits 26 per cent more greenhouse gases per capita than do England and Wales. Is that a record of environmental sustainability of which to be proud? We need a sustainable economy, but that means a different kind of economy—one that has all three legs of sustainable development and that is not just based on increasing GDP.

09:55

Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): The SNP motion talks about "competitive control"; as oxymorons go, that is right up there with leisure shopping. Recently, I have been spending all my time in Cathcart—members may have read about it in the sports pages. It was a difficult home game. I was called off the bench to play in goal and, although I was a wee bit short of match practice, I had to face a penalty kick that was taken by the Opposition striker Big Eck. He hit the corner flag from the penalty spot and I scored the winner direct from the resulting goal kick. It would be fair to say that Big Eck was as sick as a parrot, but he has resolved to take his team's next 20 penalty kicks.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Gordon: It is nice to see you, Bill.

Bill Aitken: It is nice to see you, too.

Is the member not aware that, according to the rules of football, it is impossible to score a goal direct from a goal kick?

Mr Gordon: Well, there may have been a slight deflection, but I am taking the credit.

Cathcart is prospering under Labour. Unemployment in the constituency is down 42 per cent since 1997 and, last year, youth employment went down 9.9 per cent, which compares well with the average national reduction of 6.5 per cent. Also since 1997, 1,800 people in the constituency have found new jobs under the new deal.

Glasgow, too, has been growing. Around 70,000 new jobs have been created in the city region over the past seven years; property investment is at record levels, at about £3.4 billion; and the regeneration of the River Clyde alone is worth £2.3 billion and counting—I played in goal for that team as well.

So Cathcart and Glasgow have had growth, as have Scotland and the UK. It does my heart good to know that we have a Chancellor of the Exchequer who is committed to low inflation and full employment. Labour is committed to growth, whether that is through more sensitive regulation such as we are seeing in planning reform; more infrastructure, such as the completion of the M74; or lifelong learning, which is here to stay.

The SNP is entering a period of introspection—it is a case not so much of "Hail Catalonia!" as of "Hail catatonia!" Cathcart makes that essential. The SNP should reflect on the fact that Labour is delivering growth, and is doing so—to borrow the words of that well-known football fan, Kenny MacAskill—

"By delivering on the economy, not being perceived as obsessed with the constitution."

09:58

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): The SNP motion says that the SNP wants to see

"meaningful levels of economic growth"

that

"result in rising living standards".

The Labour amendment does not say much that it is different: it says that Labour wants to

"help create the conditions that foster a sustainable economy"

and "rising living standards". Both parties claim that they want to grow the economy.

I accept that over the past decade or more there has been growth in the economy in Britain and in Scotland. I also accept that there has been wealth creation in Scotland, as there has been in the UK as a whole. Surely that must mean that we are living in a better-off society. Charlie Gordon has just claimed that we are, but that is not so. Whether someone is better off depends on the class that they come from. Over the past decade or more, some people have become much wealthier and are now better off than they could ever have imagined being in their wildest dreams. The top 10 per cent have more than doubled their wealth, but people in the lowest percentages are hardly better off. Although it is true that the shareholders and directors of the transnational corporations have done nicely through pension funds, bonuses and income, we still have enormous inequality in Scotland. Economic growth has not benefited the people of Scotland as a whole.

The biggest question in the debate concerns our reason for growing the economy. Are we doing it to line the pockets of the people in the boardrooms and of the shareholders—to increase the wealth of the top 10 per cent—or to raise living standards as a whole? If the reason for growing the economy is the latter, how do we address the enormous inequality in the country? Scotland has the greatest inequality of wealth distribution that we have seen for centuries. That is the issue that the SNP and the Labour Party should consider. The problem is that both parties talk a good game, but their policies only increase inequality.

Scotland has the lowest social mobility of any advanced capitalist country in the world with the exception of the United States of America. We are a wealthy country and yet people cannot pull themselves up by their bootstraps; they cannot, in a generation, move from the lowest 10 or 20 per cent of the population to the wealthiest.

The countries with the greatest social mobility are the Nordic countries: Norway, Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Those countries also have the least inequality. That is the issue that we need to address in the debate.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): The four countries that the member mentioned are models of social democratic capitalism and not of revolutionary Trotskyism.

Frances Curran: I think that they can be called social democratic countries. It is sad that Frank McAveety and others in the Labour Party abandoned that model in the neoliberal revolution of the 1980s and 1990s that dictates Labour's current economic policy.

As part of the mountain of evidence that Professor Richard Wilkinson assembled, he found

the view that, no matter how rich a society,

“it will still be more dysfunctional, violent, sick and sad if the gap between social classes grows”.

That is the situation in which we are today, and the neoliberal policies that the SNP and the Labour Party have accepted create an economic macro situation that gives neither party room to manoeuvre. Both parties have accepted the global laws that are set up for the multinational corporations.

If the SNP had independence, would it bow the knee to the World Trade Organisation? Would it privatise Caledonian MacBrayne? What would it do? Unless it took on organisations such as the WTO and the multinational corporations, the SNP's powers would be limited.

10:03

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): I note with interest that Labour members who have spoken in the debate have said that every time the SNP discusses oil, we look back to the past. In the few minutes that are available to me, I want to talk about oil, Scotland's energy resources and the future for Scotland.

As other members have said—I am thinking in particular of Kenny MacAskill—Scotland has a second chance at its energy future, in particular in the case of the oil industry. I want to scotch some of the myths that are peddled by the unionist parties who sit in an unholy alliance on the other side of the chamber from the SNP. Their only interest is in protecting their future careers; they are not interested in doing what is best for Scotland.

The message from the McCrone report of the 1970s is just as relevant today as it was when McCrone outlined the booming economy that Scotland could have had if we had had control of our oil revenues. A few weeks ago, I attended the offshore Europe 2005 exhibition and conference in Aberdeen, for which 45,000 delegates from around the world descended on Aberdeen to discuss the future of the North sea. There was a spring in their step. The North sea—in Scotland's territorial waters—is moving into a new era that gives huge potential for Scotland's economic future.

The Labour Party always tells us that Scotland's oil industry is in decline, but British Petroleum has just announced that it is to build a brand-new headquarters in Aberdeen. Cautious oil companies do not make multimillion-pound investments like that unless they have full confidence in the future of the oil industry.

Even the Department of Trade and Industry's official statistics—and the DTI is the most

conservative body in Government—say that there are at least 30 more years of oil and gas in the North sea. Even the DTI is saying that for every barrel of oil that is extracted, another one remains to be extracted.

Mark Ballard: The SNP manifesto says:

“An SNP government will climate change proof our policies”.

Given that even Tony Blair argues that the UK needs to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 60 per cent by 2050, how will the SNP climate change proof oil extraction?

Richard Lochhead: The simple fact that seems to escape Mark Ballard is that Scotland needs fossil fuels such as oil and gas if its economy is to keep going and not close down tomorrow. It will take 20, 30 or 40 years to switch to a low-carbon economy. Mark Ballard is telling the Scottish people that we cannot do anything about climate change unless we close down North sea production tomorrow and bring our economy—and, indeed, the economy of other countries—to a complete halt. That would lead to economic dislocation. The oil industry has to help Scotland’s economy until we switch over to renewables. As I have said, that process will take decades. The difference between the SNP on the one hand and the Green party and the unionist parties on the other is that they want North sea oil revenues over the next few decades to go to London and not to Edinburgh, where they could be used to boost the country’s economy.

On the future of North sea production and renewables, a couple of weeks ago, I met representatives of Talisman Energy, which is the biggest independent operator in the North sea. They told me that, under the company’s stewardship, oil fields that BP was supposed to close in the 1990s will continue to produce oil until 2023 and that other oil fields will pump oil and gas until around 2050. The industry has a huge future. That is why when we talk about oil and Scotland’s energy potential, we concentrate not on the past but on the future.

Allan Wilson: Does the member agree that an important component of the new exploration in the North sea is the Government’s fallow field initiative?

Richard Lochhead: Although I welcome many of the measures that have been taken, we need to take many more if we are to support the oil industry. Unfortunately, the UK Government in London sees the industry as a cash cow, not as a source of other skills and technologies that should be invested in.

We must learn lessons from Norway. For the fifth successive year, the United Nations has

declared Norway to be the best place in the world to live. That is because the Norwegians use their natural and energy resources to boost their economy and to protect their people’s interests. We should do the same in Scotland.

10:07

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde)

(Lab): Is it not funny how the SNP wants to talk about independence only after an election, never during one? The sadly departed Ronnie Barker once brought us news of a strange happening during a performance of Elgar’s “Sea Pictures” at a concert hall in Bermuda, when the man playing the triangle disappeared. Perhaps he went out looking for the SNP’s commitment to independence in Cathcart and Livingston. In both campaigns, it was the dog that did not bark.

However, after yet another gubbing at the polls, the nationalists are safely back in the chamber, well away from the electorate. Now they can get on with doing what they do best: talking to each other—or to whoever is left in the chamber—or, more accurately, talking to their activists in a bid to top up the ballot for list seats. I suppose that that is one election that an SNP candidate might stand a chance of winning.

The SNP’s double life extends beyond its embarrassment about independence. As far as the economy is concerned, I cannot believe that the nationalists have the cheek to try to lecture us about the virtues of enterprise. Is this the same SNP whose list of wild spending promises makes even our colleagues the Liberals look like iron-fisted skinflints? Is this the same SNP that demands more money for—to pick but a few examples—a Scotland-only honours system, the fishing industry, the arts and whatever the Fèisean movement is? I hope that it does not involve Highland farmers and their cattle. Before Mr Mather dismisses those pledges as the ramblings of a lunatic fringe, I should point out that he himself likes splashing the imaginary cash. He has demanded more funding for the Highlands and Islands, the creation of an independent office of national statistics, the waiving of fresh talent application fees and much, much more.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Mr McNeil: No.

Is this the same SNP whose ideological hatred of the private sector is such that it would leave the sick to suffer on waiting lists instead of using the capacity in private hospitals to get operations carried out quicker? Is this the same SNP that would have our kids educated in cold, crumbling classrooms because of its dogmatic opposition to public-private partnerships? Is this the same SNP that can hardly say the word “profit” without

spitting? Is this the same SNP that promised money left, right and centre during the Cathcart and Livingston by-election campaigns?

Yes, it is the very same SNP. Now, a mere week later, the nationalists expect us to believe that they have suddenly turned into the party of fiscal prudence. No one needs to get the Windolene out to be able to see through that.

In short, if the SNP is to have any credibility as a serious political party—and I realise that that is a big if—it cannot continue to lead this double life. It cannot be a sober bank manager during the week and dress up as a showgirl at the weekend—or perhaps it is the showgirl who dresses up as a bank manager at the weekend. I am not sure which metaphor is more apt.

Until the SNP decides whether spreadsheets or sequins suit it best, the people of Scotland—as they did in Cathcart and Livingston—will keep sending it homeward to think again.

10:11

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I congratulate Charlie Gordon on making his maiden speech this morning. It was nice to see the new MSP for Glasgow Cathcart, who I am sure will represent his constituents extremely well, taking his part in the Labour Party's traditional battle against the running dogs of capitalism. I hope that those are the only running dogs that he, unlike his predecessor, will be concerned with.

We are here at the SNP's behest to discuss its economic policy. The debate has certainly raised many questions that need to be answered. However, as far as economic policy is concerned, the nationalists remain split down the middle. It does not matter how many responsible SNP front benchers set out in sensible terms how their party would run the country; look at the myriad individuals behind them, such as our dear friend Christine Grahame, who is notorious for spending half a billion pounds every time she gets to her feet. There is an inconsistency in a party that seeks to be responsible but calls for expenditure at every opportunity.

That said, we must address the issue of the McCrone paper, which has now been made public and which, before its publication, formed the mainstay of Alex Salmond's speech to the SNP conference a few weeks ago. The publication of the paper has led to some great revelations, but the SNP has once again taken all the good points out of a particular idea while ignoring its more difficult aspects.

Although the paper, written all those years ago, highlighted some positive aspects for Scottish

nationalism, I want to provide some balance. For example, it says:

"Scottish banks could expect to find themselves inundated with a speculative inflow of foreign funds."

R G L McCrone also points out that any Scottish currency could inflate in value by 20 per cent in the first two years of independence, which could have disastrous effects on industry and export; that Scotland would be too expensive for tourists; that Scottish farmers would find European Union subsidies worth a lot less; and that there was a

"grave risk that the economy would be driven more and more to depend on the oil industry and other activities would tend to wither"

on the vine.

Jim Mather: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: No, I will carry on with my quotations.

Although Scotland would have "a good income" from oil—which I am prepared to admit—McCrone then says that

"it could never be an adequate source of employment with the rest of the economy in decline."

Although Scotland could be rich, a higher proportion of the workforce would be on the dole and the population would begin to fall.

Norway has been mentioned many times this morning. I speak to Norwegians quite often—many live in the north-east because of their involvement in the oil industry—and I see some of the things that they have told me about present-day Norway reflected in the picture that McCrone painted all those years ago. For example, although Norway is wealthy, it is not necessarily the kind of country that we would want Scotland to be. Our relationship with our UK partners has benefited us greatly, and over the past 30 years oil moneys have flowed through the Exchequer back into this country.

The SNP talks a good game, but it fails to understand the rigours of true international capitalism. There is no better example of that than the attempt by Nicola Sturgeon to encourage revulsion at the idea that Scottish Power could be taken over by a German company. In recent years, the most successful Scottish companies have grown through acquisition. Scotland is part of a world economy and it cannot exist in isolation. In that world economy, Scotland is already doing a very good job.

The Presiding Officer: We move to winding-up speeches. I must ask members to stick to their allotted times.

10:15

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):

The SNP has lost this morning's debate on the economy, just as it loses every debate that we have on the economy. It has lost the debate on the motion because my colleagues have successfully shown that, when it comes to promoting economic growth and rising living standards and addressing demographic trends, it is the Executive rather than the SNP that has the right strategy. We are building on eight years of economic success, record employment and consistent growth, thanks to our being part of a strong UK economy under the stewardship of Gordon Brown.

Jim Mather: The fact is that the gap between growth in Scotland and growth in the rest of the UK continues to increase. In the first quarter of this year, growth was 0 per cent. Where is the success in that?

Richard Baker: Scotland has had consistent growth at a time when other parts of Europe have gone in and out of recession. That consistent growth has been a great reward for Scotland.

It is the SNP's lack of a coherent strategy that is based on growing the economy, rather than the frailty of its arguments on the economy, that has been the overriding factor in the failure of the people of Scotland to trust the nationalists with their prosperity. The emphasis of Kenny MacAskill's speech was rather different, but Charlie Gordon was right to say that, instead of being perceived as being obsessed with the constitution, the SNP should aim to deliver on the economy. Alas, that was a forlorn hope, given that the SNP motion again focuses on the powers of the Parliament.

Alex Neil closed a debate on the economy that we had earlier in the year with the words, "freedom, freedom, freedom." That was rousing stuff, I am sure, but it is because the SNP tries to bend its economic strategy to the goal of what it mistakenly calls freedom that it ends up with no real strategy at all. We initiated and refreshed the smart, successful Scotland strategy with the goal of economic development in mind; that is why it is working for Scotland.

What the SNP proffers as its strategy is hopelessly confused. I do not doubt for a second that Jim Mather wants Scotland to perform effectively in the global marketplace, but the concept of economic patriotism that his deputy leader came out with implies that we could have a new policy of protectionism, when that would cut us off from the rest of the global marketplace. We cannot adopt such a policy under devolution and we could not do so under independence; to pretend that we could is to deceive the Scottish

Power workers. Other Scottish companies that are succeeding abroad would find it a costly policy.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): Will the member give way?

Richard Baker: I am sorry, but I cannot.

We now know the SNP's policy on oil as the oil overdraft. The nationalists revel in high prices one day, as they say that they would mean that an independent Scotland would be economically viable after all, but the next day they say that high prices are bad for Scottish business. That is a policy of confusion and hypocrisy.

The SNP's favourite game is to pick a single aspect of an independent small nation's economy and to hold it up as a beacon, but that approach is flawed, too. We have heard a huge amount about Norway and its oil fund from Mr Maxwell and others, but *The Economist*—which I am sure that Mr Mather must read—writes:

"many of Norway's 3.4m-odd voters do not share the view that they live in nirvana. With all that oil wealth, they cannot understand why the welfare system has so many defects. There is a shortage of kindergartens, hospitals are understaffed, taxes are high, petrol costs as much as in non-oil countries and pensioners have problems making ends meet."

It is no wonder that the Labour Party won the election in Norway, that Scotland beat Norway 2-1 in the football or that, with such an obviously flawed economic policy, the SNP performed so pitifully in the election that Charlie Gordon—who gave an excellent maiden speech earlier this morning—won for Labour in Cathcart.

The SNP has lost the argument on the economy this morning, just as it lost that argument in Cathcart. It is clear that, when it presents its woeful excuse for an economic strategy to the rest of the people of Scotland in 2007, it will be roundly rejected again.

10:19

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): I join other members in welcoming Charlie Gordon to the Parliament. I congratulate him both on his maiden speech and on taking over my mantle as the new boy. I wish him well.

The debate is important. The Scottish economy is crucial to everything that the Parliament does and to everything that it aspires to do. We need a successful economy to fund the public services on which we all rely. As Bill Clinton famously reminded his campaign team, "It's the economy, stupid." Perhaps all of us should reflect on that daily; we might or might not wish to drop the "stupid".

The SNP motion talks about Government having a duty to create

"meaningful levels of economic growth".

I agree, but I would go further than that. It ought to be the duty of Government to foster the conditions in which we can deliver the highest levels of sustainable economic growth. Perhaps that is what Jim Mather was driving at. The motion refers to the failed policies of the past 30 years. Some policies have failed—in some cases, fairly spectacularly—and Governments of all parties have made mistakes. What is important is that we learn from those mistakes.

It is not surprising that the SNP constantly brings the debate back to independence—which is what I assume it means by the phrase “full competitive control” that is used in the motion. If the SNP does not stand for independence, it does not really stand for anything. However, I wonder whether independence is a meaningful concept when we talk about the economy, because the impact of international trade and the development of the global economy mean that although Scotland could well be independent in name, it could never be independent in practice.

As Murdo Fraser pointed out, it is the policy that is important. Independence would certainly provide a different framework in which to implement economic policy, but it would not necessarily provide a better economic policy. It is true that the Parliament does not have the powers over the Scottish economy that some members of all parties would like it to have. There is a proper debate to be had on that, but if we do not use the powers that we have responsibly and effectively, we will struggle to convince a sceptical public if or, indeed, when we ask for greater powers. I disagree with Jim Mather that there is a public appetite for greater powers at the moment.

John Swinburne: Does the member agree that the people of Clydebank—who were mentioned earlier—would have been delighted if the order to build three aircraft carriers had gone to the Clyde rather than to France and if the Ferguson yard in Duncan McNeil’s constituency had been awarded the contract for building a fishery protection vessel? That could have happened if the contract for that vessel had been put under a Ministry of Defence mantle.

Derek Brownlee: I am sure that people in Clydebank would look forward to any form of regeneration. It is certainly true that there are parts of Scotland that have lagged behind the rest of the country.

This afternoon we will hear an interesting statement on business rates. In all probability, the announcement that is made will be welcome, even if it is long overdue. As we prepare for that statement, it is worth reflecting on the policy on business rates that has operated over the past five years. Has the higher level of business rates increased economic growth, made our businesses

more competitive and created jobs? I think that we all know the answer to that question. Perhaps the minister will give us his response this afternoon.

The economy is a hugely important subject and I am glad that the SNP has used some of its time to focus on what the Parliament can do to improve matters, even if—this will come as no surprise—I do not agree with every aspect of what it said. It is important that we explore what we can do within the current boundaries of devolution. There is no reason why we should be pessimistic about what we can achieve for the Scottish economy, unless we lack the political will to change direction when our policies are seen to fail. That is the real test for the Executive.

10:23

The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon): I, too, begin by congratulating Charlie Gordon on his maiden speech. He was right to say that, in Cathcart, there was an open goal, but I disagree that when Big Eck took the penalty it hit the corner flag; I think that Big Eck fell on his face in the run-up and did not manage to kick the ball at all. Although Mr Gordon is a new boy, someone should point out to him that, unlike Glasgow City Council, the Executive is a two-party coalition and not a one-party state.

The debate has been a bit like “Groundhog Day” in that, as usual, the SNP has portrayed Scotland as the victim—the big, bad English boy beat us up and ran off with our oil money. Kenny MacAskill came up with his conspiracy theories and his good old chip-on-the-shoulder rhetoric. Poor helpless Scotland was mugged and robbed of its oil cash—if only. That is complete and utter nonsense, as the facts clearly demonstrate.

In 1974, when McCrone’s paper was produced, the price of oil was at an all-time high as the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries hiked up the price and economies round the world were hit with the first of the two oil shocks. McCrone could not have foreseen then that the price of oil would collapse to \$10 a barrel, which is what it was through much of the 1980s and the early 1990s—in fact, right through to recent times.

The facts are that, even if all the oil revenues from North sea oil had been apportioned to Scotland, we would still have been in overall deficit to the UK over the past 30 years. The real question is how well the oil money was invested during that time. We got the answer from Mr Brownlee in his wind-up speech, because he admitted that the Tories had made huge numbers of mistakes during their stewardship of the economy at that time.

Murdo Fraser: Not huge numbers.

George Lyon: Mr Brownlee was certainly more than willing to admit that a substantial number of mistakes had been made.

As I said, the real question is how well the oil money was invested. The answer is that it was wasted on unemployment benefit and on throwing people on to the scrapheap.

Jim Mather: Does the minister really believe that the Scottish people are incapable of learning and taking messages from other countries and converging on best outcomes? Does he think that we would go for a disastrous outcome and stick with it?

George Lyon: No, the Scottish people are extremely wise and they can see through the rhetoric that the SNP keeps putting before them. In the past three elections, they have rejected the SNP's view of the world in favour of the real world. As Charlie Gordon said, it is a day of catatonia for the SNP, and the real question that confronts the SNP is what its fiscal and monetary policy would be if it was ever fortunate enough to persuade Scotland to vote for independence. Would the SNP adopt the high tax, high public expenditure Scandinavian model? Norway and Finland are the only two small countries that have been mentioned in the debate; there has been no mention of Ireland, which is the other alternative, of course—the low taxation, low public spending Irish model. Alternatively, would it adopt the Alice in Wonderland economic model that combines the Irish taxation level and the Scandinavian spending level? That is the position that is so often articulated by SNP spokespeople in debates in the Parliament. The electorate rightly sees that for what it is: economic illiteracy. That is why it has rejected the SNP so many times over the past three to four years.

The Executive is investing in education, skills, support for research and development and entrepreneurial dynamism. From next year, we will be spending £22 million a year in our schools to promote enterprise and risk taking to our young people. We are also investing record amounts in improving our transport infrastructure. Later this afternoon, the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform will confirm that we will cut Scotland's business rate poundage and bring it into line with that of England. Currently, rateable values in Scotland are lower on average than those in England and combining that with a business rate poundage that is equal to England's will mean that we will have taken a major step towards delivering a key competitive advantage for Scottish firms.

I believe that the Executive has created a great environment in which to do business. Those words are not just mine; they are also the words of Tony Froggatt, the chief executive of Scottish and

Newcastle plc, who last night was designated Cable and Wireless businessman of the year. He stated that Scotland is a great environment in which to do business, and I ask colleagues to support that notion.

10:29

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Charlie Gordon on his maiden speech. I am sure that the First Minister, with gritted teeth, would have been watching it closely on a monitor. I first met Charlie when he was campaigning for independence for Scotland as a member of the breakaway Scottish Labour Party. I hope that he has not changed his mind, even though he has changed his party. I disagree with him on one issue, which is his claim that Glasgow is booming under Labour. Glasgow has a real unemployment rate of about 28 per cent. With that level of unemployment, to claim that the city is booming makes Charlie look a Charlie—a real Charlie.

Let us start with the facts about the Scottish economy.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: I will take it later.

After eight years of a Labour Government and six years of a Lib-Lab pact in Holyrood, let us look at the facts. Fact one is about unemployment. The real level of unemployment in Scotland is about 250,000 people. About 90,000 unemployed claim benefit, but another 50,000 or 60,000 officially unemployed do not claim benefit. Thirty-five thousand 16 to 19-year-olds are not in employment, education or training, which is the highest percentage in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, according to the Executive. In addition, there are many thousands on incapacity benefit who can and want to work and tens of thousands in part-time employment who want to be in full-time employment.

Let us be clear: the idea that Gordon Brown has solved unemployment in Scotland is total nonsense. We continue to have very high, very concentrated levels of unemployment in Scotland, most noticeably in the constituencies of Des McNulty, Duncan McNeil and Charlie Gordon, as well as in many other Labour representatives' constituencies.

Karen Gillon: On that point, in this horrible country that Mr Neil describes, why did the voters in the desperate constituency of Cathcart singularly fail, only last Thursday, to accept the SNP's arguments as a positive statement for Scotland?

Alex Neil: I am sure that they will reverse that decision in 2007. They will recognise that 300 years of the union has been a disaster for Scotland and for Glasgow.

Let us look at facts and the investment record. Our competitors invest about 20 per cent of their GDP in their economies; in Scotland, we invest less than 10 per cent. The figures on manufacturing exports that we got yesterday are some of the worst ever produced. Two weeks ago, we got the new figure on research and development expenditure. It is not going up; it is going down, although it is already one of the lowest in the OECD.

Allan Wilson: Can Mr Neil explain to us how an independent Scottish pound tied to the price of a barrel of oil would help to improve Scottish manufacturing exports?

Alex Neil: It would improve them enormously, because of exchange and interest rates. For example, our industry would not face an interest rate that is twice the real rate in countries in the euro zone or North America. A lower interest rate would be a massive boost to industry and manufacturing jobs in Scotland.

Let us deal with oil, not by looking at the past, but by looking into the future.

Allan Wilson *rose*—

Alex Neil: I will not give way again.

The reality is that we now have a second chance with oil. All the lies that were told about oil 30 years ago, as Gavin McCrone pointed out, are now being retold today. However, the reality is that we are in for a long, sustained period of high oil prices. As Lord Oxburgh, the chairman of Shell UK, has pointed out, we are in a situation in which, no matter what scenario we paint, oil will remain at \$60, \$70 or perhaps \$80 a barrel. We are also in a situation in which Gordon Brown is depending on oil revenue this year to bail him out of his economic black hole. I find it amazing that the unionists argue that we could not be independent because Scotland would have a small deficit. Gordon Brown is running up record deficits. Does that mean that the UK cannot function as an independent country?

George Lyon: The real question is what the SNP's fiscal and monetary policy would be if Scotland was independent. Would the SNP adopt the Irish or the Scandinavian model? We have not heard clarity on that from Mr Neil.

Alex Neil: George Lyon has heard clarity; he just does not want to listen.

If we had control over not only oil but all our financial and economic policy, we would be able to do something that I would have thought every

Liberal and Labour member would want to do—we would be able to use the natural resources of Scotland, and the resultant revenue and downstream jobs, to solve the problems of unemployment, deprivation and poverty. Instead, we have nothing but a litany of complacency from the two coalition parties about the state of Scotland today.

Our message is very simple: put Scotland's wealth to work for the people of Scotland. The only way in which we will be able to do that is by freeing ourselves from the controls of London through an independent Scotland.

Scottish Olympic Team

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-3381, in the name of Michael Matheson, on the Scottish Olympic team.

10:36

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP):

Anyone who is ambitious for sport in Scotland wants to see our competitors competing at the highest possible level on the international stage. That is why I believe that Scotland should have its own Olympic team, competing in the Olympic games alongside the other Olympic nations.

A range of members across this chamber will be riddled with self-doubt over whether Scotland can have its own Olympic team and whether we have the talent to have our own Olympic team. Others will think, "Well, Scotland really shouldn't get above its station." In fact, there is nothing to stop Scotland forming its own national Olympic committee. Of the 202 national Olympic committees in the world, 13 do not have national status at the United Nations. They include two teams from the Virgin Islands, and teams from the Cayman Islands, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Andorra, to name just a few. Despite not being represented at the UN, they are ambitious for their sportsmen and women and want them to participate every four years in the biggest sporting event in the world.

In the unionist alliance, there are those who would doubt those facts. Let me refer them to a quotation from the International Olympic Committee:

"Although most National Olympic Committees are from nations, the IOC also recognises independent territories, commonwealths, protectorates and geographical areas."

I concede that Scotland is not an independent nation—yet—but the last time that I looked at a map we were certainly a geographical area. The Olympic charter makes it clear that Scotland can have its own national Olympic committee. The criteria that are set down make that possible. There is no technical or legal reason why we should not have our own team.

There are those in the chamber who would say that Scottish athletes are better off training and competing alongside the Great Britain squad for the Olympics. That is what Jamie McGrigor is trying to say in his rambling amendment, in which—despite being a die-hard unionist—he shows that he does not know the difference between a union jack and a union flag.

Some say that we would be better off competing under the GB system, but that strikes me as an

argument for abolishing any form of independent representation for Scotland on the international field. Let us get rid of the Scottish football team, the Scottish rugby team, and the Scottish Commonwealth games team. If we believe the argument, those teams would all do better under the GB flag.

However, I know that even the Executive is not persuaded by that argument. The Executive wants to encourage Scottish athletes to train and compete here in Scotland. Target 7 of sport 21, the Executive's sports policy, wants to make

"sport experience so attractive and successful that all Scottish athletes will want to live, train, compete, work and study in Scotland".

I support that view and I am sure that many others in the chamber support it too. To argue that our athletes would be better off under the GB system is contrary to the Executive's own policy.

The Olympics are coming to London in 2012. I believe that that will provide Scotland with an excellent opportunity to join the Olympic family by having its own team. We have talented athletes who can compete on the international stage. At the previous two Olympic games, Scottish sportsmen and women succeeded in securing 13 medals. What we need to do, with our own Olympic team, is to build on that success and ensure that we achieve even greater success in the future.

The Olympic games are not just about winning; they are about participating. A benefit of having our own Olympic team is that it would increase the opportunity for Scottish sportsmen and women to participate in the biggest sporting event in the world. At the most recent Olympic games, only 24 Scots made it into the GB team, whereas New Zealand, with only 4 million people, was able to send a team of 150. If more of our athletes can compete at the pinnacle of sporting events, that will encourage them to strive further and act as a catalyst for young people to get much more involved in sport.

The key objectives in sport 21 are to ensure that we widen participation, increase physical activity and ensure that Scotland has greater representation on the international stage. Those are all Executive objectives in its existing policy, but surely they would be much more achievable if we had our own Olympic team. That would increase and widen participation, give us greater representation on the international stage, and enthuse our young people to participate in sport.

Last week, an ambitious campaign was launched to establish a Scottish Olympic team. The campaign has the support of some 78 per cent of the Scottish public. They are ambitious for Scotland's athletes. There is no technical reason

why Scotland cannot have its own Olympic team. What we need is the political will to ensure that it happens. What we need is for Scotland's politicians to demonstrate that they are as ambitious as the Scottish people for our athletes to compete at the highest level. I hope that members across the chamber—even unionists—will join us in supporting the campaign to ensure that Scotland establishes its own Olympic team. By doing that, we will ensure that Scottish athletes will participate in the biggest sporting event in the world.

I move,

That the Parliament congratulates London on securing the 2012 Olympic Games, which will encourage many young Scots to become involved in sport; welcomes the recent launch of a campaign to establish a Scottish Olympic team; notes that 78 per cent of Scots support the establishment of such a team; recognises that the creation of a Scottish Olympic team will inspire many young Scots to achieve sporting excellence in order to represent their nation in the Olympic arena, and calls on politicians from across the political spectrum to rise up to the challenge set by the people of Scotland and work to establish a Scottish Olympic team.

10:43

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): I warmly congratulate London on winning the right to stage the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games. I was pleased to note the unequivocal support in the Scottish National Party motion for the London games. It might be said, however, that Michael Matheson doth protest too much. He must surely forgive the rest of us a little confusion, given some of the support that his party has given London over the past 12 months.

Here is Pete Wishart showing support on 13 October 2004:

"It is now clear to the Scottish people that this is another example of Scotland pays and London gains."

Then we had Alex Neil saying on 17 January 2005:

"This is Dome Mark 2."

Even better, on 27 June we had Mr Neil writing to the IOC to suggest that Scotland would lose out if London won the games. He stated:

"I hope that the IOC will bear Scotland in mind when making their decision."

Within days of the IOC making its positive decision to host the games in London, the SNP was still desperately trying to undermine the United Kingdom's case.

I do not dispute that the SNP is expressing support for the London games, but it has an odd way of showing its support. That takes us to the heart of the matter: in the world of the SNP, the

term "London" is a metonym for England. The SNP speaks of London politicians, the London Treasury and the London Government; it avoids the word "England", but no one is fooled. The real reason for the SNP's equivocation on the London games is the fear that strikes in nationalist hearts that a great British event will cement the unity in diversity and the collective national spirit of the nations that make up the United Kingdom.

For the SNP, the issue is not a separate Olympic team per se. That is merely the vehicle to reduce the debate to a vain attempt to undermine the constitutional settlement, as the SNP does with every debate, from that on our evening news to the famed Sewel motion on the carriage of guide dogs for the blind in private hire taxis. The party that wants a separate state finds itself praying in aid the constitutional status of the British Virgin Islands and Guam in its quest to have fewer Scottish medallists in 2012. The London games are an opportunity for Britain and Scotland to enjoy on our doorstep the biggest and greatest sporting event. The games will allow athletes from throughout Britain to fulfil a lifetime ambition, not only of winning an Olympic medal as part of team GB but of doing so on home turf.

The fact that Scotland is part of a British team does not mean that we do not have ambitions of our own. The Scottish Government wants Scotland to be a successful sporting nation that competes on the world stage with pride, honour and distinction. We recognise the role that sport plays, internationally as well as at home, in promoting understanding and co-operation, breaking down barriers and celebrating diversity. We have ambitions for our athletes—we want them to realise their potential and to attain success at the highest level, be that European, world, Commonwealth or Olympic competitions. However, we must be realistic about how and where those ambitions can be realised.

There are many reasons why the Executive does not support the call to create a Scottish Olympic team, but none of them is to do with lack of ambition. Our ambition is demonstrated by our determination to bring the 2014 Commonwealth games to Glasgow. A combination of the strengths of all parts of Great Britain offers a greater chance of international success and the opportunity for athletes to train with a larger pool of world-class competitors. Scottish athletes with the talent to attain GB squad membership gain from competing with and against athletes of a similar calibre—it is good for their development. We certainly have exceptionally talented Scots who have given truly great performances on the Olympic stage.

We come to the downside of the SNP's proposal. When Scots cheered for Kelly Holmes, they were sharing in the delight at the success of a

compatriot. Are they to be denied that? The majority of Scots' medal successes on the Olympic stage have come when they have been part of a team of athletes from the home countries. For example, Shirley Robertson's gold medal in Athens was won in a team event with two non-Scots and Chris Hoy's silver in Sydney was won in a team with another Scot, Craig MacLean, and Jason Queally of England.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Does the minister accept that SNP members and the 78 per cent of people in Scotland who would like a Scottish team in the Olympics will continue to cheer on outstanding individuals such as Kelly Holmes? However, that is nothing whatever to do with the desire to have a Scottish team. Why should we have a Scottish football team, but not a Scottish Olympic team?

Patricia Ferguson: I had a funny feeling that we might get to that issue at the end of the day. Scotland's sporting participation is rather like the devolution settlement: just as we determine health and education matters in Scotland and social security and defence matters in Britain, so we can participate in football and the Commonwealth games as Scotland, but in the Davis cup and the Olympic games as Britain. Just as with the devolution settlement, the only people who find that to be a problem are nationalist ideologues—the issue is not what is theoretically possible, but what is best for Scotland.

Mr Ewing has said implicitly that he wants to deny Scottish members of teams the opportunity to contribute to the GB medal tally. Scottish athletes will contribute to strong GB teams in 2012 and in the future. Is the SNP really saying that we should deny Shirley Robertson the chance to win gold as part of one of those teams? I sincerely hope that it is not. Scots have done well through being part of strong GB teams at the Olympics and the Paralympics. Selection for a GB team means that athletes are of a certain standard—they are the best in Britain, not just in Scotland. Arguably, Scotland enjoys the best of both worlds, by competing as Scotland in the Commonwealth games and as part of the GB or UK set-up for the Olympics, certain world championships and other events.

For all those reasons, the Executive does not support the move to create a separate Scottish Olympic team. However, the Scottish Parliament can rest assured that we and sportscotland will continue to work with our partners to ensure that as many Scots as possible are selected as part of a successful GB Olympic team. Mr Matheson was keen to quote from the IOC charter. However, we must not ignore the founding principles of the Olympic games. The point is that people of all races come together to observe the ancient

concept of the Olympic truce. The Olympic games are about pulling together, not about pulling apart.

I move amendment S2M-3381.2, to leave out from "recent launch" to end and insert:

"Scottish bid to secure the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014; recognises that these two events would provide an unparalleled opportunity within the United Kingdom for Scots to perform at the highest level, and notes that both events would provide a major impetus to participation and performance in sport at all levels, with all the health and other benefits that brings."

10:51

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The Conservatives appreciate very much the enormous effort of Sebastian Coe and his team to secure the Olympic games for the United Kingdom, unlike the SNP, which said that the bid was a waste of money. The success was achieved against all the odds. Sebastian Coe came to the Scottish Parliament to lobby for our support and I am sure that the support that he gained here played no small part in that great victory. Had the bid been seen just as an English bid, I doubt whether it would have won. Once again, the strength of the United Kingdom proved its worth.

The Olympic charter, which was established by Pierre de Coubertin, states:

"The goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport".

That is particularly important during the turbulent and violent times in which we live. The Olympic goal of achieving excellence in a sporting and friendly atmosphere in which competitors strive to give their best and to be the best is thrilling. I do not like the SNP's politically motivated call for a separate Scottish Olympic team, as it questions the loyalty of past Scottish Olympic heroes who fought valiantly to win medals for the Great Britain team, as did their Welsh, English and Irish counterparts.

Michael Matheson: Will the member give way?

Mr McGrigor: No, I want to make progress.

Different loyalties to national identity do not have to be divided loyalties. Many sports have traditionally been played at GB level, a structure that has served the United Kingdom, athletes and Scottish sport well since the modern Olympic games started in 1896. Why change something that works well? I am afraid that the SNP motion is sour grapes from the party that would sacrifice Scotland's position as a big fish in a successful British union to become a far less significant player on the European or world stage.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McGrigor: Not at the moment.

The United Kingdom has greater influence in Europe and the rest of the world than an independent Scotland would have. In the same way, team GB is far more powerful in the Olympic games than a Scottish team on its own would be. Chris Hoy, a gold medallist in cycling, in commenting on Linda Fabiani's suggestion for a Scottish Olympic team, said:

"I think if we do that it would dilute the resources and the expertise we've got in the British team."

He went on to say that he is a very proud Scot. The SNP does not have a monopoly on patriotism and it should not try to make the Olympics a political issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McGrigor, you have one minute left.

Mr McGrigor: The SNP has been consistent only in its blatant opportunism. First, Alex Neil called the UK's bid for the 2012 Olympics a waste of public money. Then, the SNP supported Glasgow's 2014 bid for the Commonwealth games, which we also support. However, the SNP called on the Scottish Executive to ask Westminster for lottery funding for the Commonwealth games, even though it had said that the Olympic games are a waste of money. By doing that, the SNP has shown a talent for muddling that has more to do with promoting its nationalist agenda than with promoting Scottish sport effectively in the UK, Europe and the world beyond.

Successful Scottish athletes have enjoyed the best training facilities and coaching that the UK has to offer. Ask Shirley Robertson, the sailing gold medallist, or Katherine Grainger, the rowing silver medallist, where they trained. If Scotland were to go it alone, as the SNP would like it to do, our athletes would have reduced resources in terms of facilities and coaching expertise.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does Mr McGrigor accept that talented athletes from all over the world train in different places all over the world? Does he also accept that the facilities in the UK are owned as much by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as they are by England?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If you take an intervention after your time is up, Mr McGrigor, you must answer very quickly.

Mr McGrigor: A Scottish team on its own would probably not get the English facilities, because in an independent Scotland those facilities would have to be paid for.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McGrigor, you must stop now.

Mr McGrigor: I ask the Scottish Executive to use the power and influence that it holds for the time being to promote areas of Scotland—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McGrigor, you seem to be utterly oblivious to the warnings I gave you that you had one minute left, that you were over your time and that you must stop now. For the avoidance of doubt, you have stopped now.

Mr McGrigor: I move amendment S2M-3381.1, to leave out from "London" to end and insert:

"the Great British effort, led by Sebastian Coe, which secured the 2012 Olympic Games for London; recognises that this will greatly encourage young people from Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England to participate in sport and in the quest for Olympic glory for individuals and Team GB; acknowledges the pride of the many Scots who have competed successfully for Team GB; notes that different loyalties do not have to be divided loyalties and that many sports have traditionally been played at GB level, a structure which has served the United Kingdom, athletes and Scottish sport well since the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896; welcomes the news that Hampden Park will host the Olympic football and urges the Scottish Executive to promote other venues in Scotland, such as mountain biking at Fort William, rowing at Strathclyde Park and equestrianism at Gleneagles; further notes that Scottish athletes who compete for Great Britain under the Union Jack do not cease to be Scottish, and believes that, by pooling resources and expertise, Great Britain can compete successfully against much larger nations, providing invaluable experience for the athletes and a source of great national pride for sports fans."

10:56

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): Michael Matheson made an exceptionally good speech; he put forward the best possible case for his point of view, which holds some attractions, but I do not share it. On balance, and for the following reasons, I am content to support Patricia Ferguson's amendment.

First, there is a variety of bases for international teams. One of the most successful recent ones has been the change from a UK to a European golf team, which functions extremely successfully. The basis for teams is historical. Scotland was a prime mover in starting international football and rugby, so it has a team in those sports. Other areas, such as the Olympic games and the Davis cup, work in a different way. That is how history is.

The argument that all sorts of countries that are not nation states are members of the Olympic movement sounds good, but I am interested in any examples that Michael Matheson or anyone else can give me of existing nation states that have been disassembled only for Olympic purposes and not for any other purposes. There is a difference. With all due respect, Scotland is a bit different from the British Virgin Islands.

Linda Fabiani: Will the member give way?

Donald Gorrie: No. We do not have long enough for our speeches.

In 1956, I was arguably the runner-up and failed to get into the British Olympic team for the 800m. If there had been a Scottish team, I would probably have got into it, so there is an attraction in having a Scottish team. However, it is better to stay as we are and accept that we do our best within a United Kingdom team; many benefits arise from that set-up, as Patricia Ferguson said.

I fully support the London bid, which will benefit the United Kingdom as a whole, but it will reduce the amount of lottery money that is available to support sporting and other causes in Scotland. The Executive must ensure that that reduction is made up, either by Government funds or in some other way. The key is to have the strongest possible grass-roots sport. All parties accept that, although we might disagree on how to achieve it. If we provide more financial and personal support, more influence and better facilities for grass-roots sport, we will have more good sportspeople—it will not matter if they perform in some sports for the United Kingdom and in some sports for Scotland. We need to have as many good, young sportspeople as possible. I am sure that the minister will attend to that. We must all ensure that she does.

11:00

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I commend Michael Matheson for the way in which he moved the motion. He put the case, clearly and comprehensively, for Scotland to send its own Olympic team to London in 2012. None of his major arguments has been tackled by the speakers thus far. The minister refused to say why Scotland can have her own football team but not her own Olympic team. Interestingly, she did not respond to Mr Matheson's argument that there is no technical or legal barrier to Scotland having her own team, although at one time those who espouse the British-team-only cause argued that because Scotland is not an independent nation state, she would be barred. Of course, that is absolutely not the case.

We learned from this debate that Donald Gorrie could not get into the British Olympic team, although he could have participated in a Scottish Olympic team, but that is not enough to put us off pursuing the motion. I would have loved to see Donald Gorrie take part in the Olympics, had I been of the right age.

No one has addressed the fact that, from testing the opinions of more than 1,000 people, we know that nearly four out of five people in Scotland want Scotland to have her own team. I accept Jamie

McGrigor's point that no one has a monopoly on patriotism, but that is not our argument: we argue that everybody should have the chance to compete for our own country of Scotland. The snide and disparaging remarks that were made by the minister and, uncharacteristically, by Jamie McGrigor do us a disservice. Those who have led the grass-roots campaign are disappointed that the comments appear to be based on a partisan agenda. They argue that the debate should be about not politics, but what is best for Scotland, which is why we believe that Scotland should have her own team.

I will dwell on my experience of promoting aspiring athletes at grass-roots level. I agree with Donald Gorrie that that is where we should direct our attention. A great many talented athletes in places such as Badenoch and Strathspey in my constituency aspire to compete in the winter Olympics in Turin next year in, for example, skiing and snowboarding. They tell me that there are opportunities at grass-roots level and at the very top level, where the cream get support, but that in the middle we have no rungs on the ladder. That is a serious problem. The minister, who is shaking her head, does not seem to accept that that problem exists.

I am proud and delighted that we are moving the motion. Outwith this chamber, there will be none of the petty personal attacks or the professional fouls that we have seen this morning, with the minister as usual playing the man, not the ball. There will simply be a recognition that the idea's time has come. Scotland should take her place on the international stage, not as part of Donald Gorrie's euroland team, but as part of the Scottish team in the Olympic games, with our athletes doing their best, taking part and winning medals for our own country.

11:04

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): If I were in a political party that aspired to Government, but which had just lost two by-elections, I would have hoped that my party had learned some lessons and that it would focus on the issues that matter to the people of Scotland. The fact that we are debating more of the nonsense for which the SNP is renowned shows that it has learned nothing and that it has no policies beyond the hyperbolic ravings of Alex Salmond.

Make no mistake: this debate is not about a vision of a better Scotland. Even worse, it has nothing to do with the interests of Scotland's athletes. Just ask Olympic cycling champion Chris Hoy, who warned us that dividing the United Kingdom into its constituent nations would weaken

the chances of British cyclists competing at the highest level.

Linda Fabiani: Does the member agree that, although Chris Hoy is such a talented athlete, we have no training facility in Scotland to encourage others to follow in his footsteps?

Michael McMahon: Yes, which is why we should concentrate on providing those facilities, not on breaking up the GB team.

The fact is that, rather than supporting London's games, which the Scottish National Party claims in its motion to do, the SNP has consistently tried to find fault with them. In doing so, it has done nothing more than expose its enmity towards Britain and England. That attitude is, simply, at odds with that of the majority of Scots. Not only is 2012 a genuine opportunity for our home-grown talent to shine, but it presents Scotland with the opportunity for massive economic benefits and gives us a chance to showcase Scottish sports facilities ahead of Glasgow's bid to host the Commonwealth games in 2014.

I fear that all that is a bigger vision than the SNP can contend with so, while our focus for 2012 should be on ensuring that as many Scots as possible are selected for team GB and have the best possible support available, the SNP looks inwards and throws a tartan tantrum.

When Colin Montgomery sank the winning putt in the Ryder cup, he was subsequently and rightly hailed as a Scottish sporting hero. How proud was Scotland last week when Andrew Murray led Britain in the Davis cup? However, why was there no outcry from the SNP to try to stop our Scottish golfers taking part in a European team and sharing glory with the Irish, the French and the other nationalities? Why were there no pleas for a Scottish tennis team in the Davis cup? The one difference is that those events were not associated with the Olympic games in London.

I look forward to seeing the Scottish successors to Wells, Wilkie and Hoy in 2012. I will be cheering them, along with the successors to Linford Christie, Daley Thompson, Kelly Holmes and Steve Redgrave. Those are the type of athletes who have made me proud when they competed as British athletes in the past.

Scots can win in London in 2012, but they will have a genuine chance to do so only if they are part of a well-resourced and properly supported British team. This morning, the SNP has said quite clearly that it would rather have the mediocrity of 100 than the excellence of 25. We should be focusing on that excellence, not on petty nationalism. It might be good enough for the SNP merely to have Scots participate in a Scottish team in 2012, but I want those who are good enough to

compete with the best and to bring home medals to do so as Scots, for Scotland and Britain.

11:07

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP): Presiding Officer, I have been away too long, as any fair-minded person would agree. I thank members and members of staff for the warm welcome back that we have been given after our month away.

I will always remember how I heard the news that London had secured the 2012 Olympic bid. I was walking up the main street in Auchterarder when a woman opened her door and shouted, "Have you heard the news?" I asked whether the police had gone on the radio to say that the G8 demonstration would be going ahead rather than being cancelled, which they had said in their previous announcement. "No," she said, "London's won the Olympics." As someone who lived in London for eight years, I was overjoyed. I share London's joy not least because a big part of the Olympic stadium will be built in Hackney in east London, which definitely needs such investment. Having been there again recently, for a stop the war demonstration, I know that people in the east end of London are looking forward to the Olympics coming to their part of the world.

I suspect that this debate about establishing a Scottish Olympic team is linked to the case for independence for Scotland and I also suspect that we will not get the Olympic team until we have independence.

Michael Matheson made a fair point when he said that we already have a Scottish football team in a truly worldwide organisation. That point is fairer than the one about our rugby and Commonwealth games teams because few countries are involved in those events compared with the number that are involved in the Olympics. However, the logic of the Executive's argument seems flawed. If the minister's logic were followed, we would not have a Scottish football team but a single team comprising Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England—a Great Britain football team. To be fair to the minister and the Labour members, I accept that they are not arguing for that. Nonetheless, that is the logic of their case.

I agree that the spirit of the motion is about encouraging young Scots to become involved in sport and to fulfil their potential. That means ensuring that those youngsters get access to the best coaches and facilities that we can provide. When I was in the Strathclyde University athletics team, I had the benefit of having the coaching expertise of Frank Dick at my disposal. The coaching was great. It did not do my athletics career much good, but you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Linda Fabiani: Will Colin Fox give us his views on the talented athletes scholarship scheme and the fact that, of the 107 athletes on the scholars programme for 2012, only one is based in Scotland?

Colin Fox: It often seems to be the case that when Scottish athletes reach a certain level of ability, they have to go to America or elsewhere to further their career and ensure that they reach higher standards. That is to be regretted and I hope that, in the not-too-distant future, they will be able to reach their full potential in Scotland.

However, regardless of whether our athletes are in a GB team or a Scottish team, the Scottish Parliament has to make a commitment to them that we will ensure that those coaching facilities are available.

Baron de Coubertin's idea of the Olympic spirit is completely at odds with a spirit that is all too prevalent in the world today and which can be seen in the spirit of the G8. The Olympic spirit is a democratic spirit. Yes, it is a competitive spirit, but it holds uppermost the idea that we can all take part at the highest level and that medals are meaningless unless everyone competes. That is exactly at odds with the spirit of the G8, which is undemocratic and elitist.

11:12

Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP): The London Olympics in 2012 provide the ideal circumstances for the first Scottish Olympic team. We have already heard that there is no legal impediment to a Scottish Olympic team. However, there is a political—or rather a unionist—obstacle. Unionist politicians have today objected to a Scottish Olympic team in a way that displays an absolute poverty of ambition and is an attempt to dampen the aspirations of the Scottish people and their athletes.

Of course, the minister says that she has aspirations for Scottish athletes and for Scotland—as long as those aspirations are not too high, because we do not want to get above our station. I agree with her on one point, however, which might surprise her. We should not let nationalist ideology determine our sporting future. On that point we are agreed. That is why we in the SNP reject the narrow British nationalism that is advanced in the Labour and Tory amendments today.

The SNP supports Glasgow's bid for the 2014 Commonwealth games. However, by deleting all references to a Scottish Olympic team, the Labour amendment has the effect of suggesting that having a Scottish Olympic team and bidding for the 2014 Commonwealth games would be mutually exclusive and that, somehow, it is possible for Scottish athletes to perform at the

highest level in a Scottish Commonwealth games team but not in a Scottish Olympic games team.

The Tory amendment displays the same old unionist cringe as the Labour amendment, with the addition of the strains of "Rule Britannia" reverberating through it—"It's team GB versus the world, we'll take them all on." The Tory amendment says that

"by pooling resources and expertise, Great Britain can compete successfully against much larger nations".

The implication of that statement is that smaller nations cannot so compete.

That is nonsense, particularly when we consider the most recent winter Olympics. Team GB, competing against the world, came 19th with two medals. Norway, which has a similar population to Scotland, came second with 24 medals; Finland came seventh with seven medals; and Estonia, with 1.5 million people, came 17th with three medals. The fact is that those smaller nations have the opportunity to bring forward a higher number of athletes to participate in the Olympics than is currently the case for Scotland.

I turn my attention to football. Sepp Blatter, the FIFA president, appears to have decreed that there will be a GB football team for the 2012 London Olympics. As we all know, there has always been a group within football that questions the right of the home nations to compete independently on the international stage. Given the comments that we have heard today, I have no doubt that that view will find some favour among the British nationalists in the Parliament. However, members should be in no doubt that a GB Olympic football team will put us on a slippery slope to a permanent GB international squad. That is why Scottish football supporters should—for once, at least—back the SFA, resist the attempts to strengthen our Britishness, which Jack Straw would advocate, and reject the idea of a GB football team.

If members believe that Scotland should retain its own football team and that Scottish athletes should be able to compete fully at all levels, they should back the only sensible option, which is a Scottish Olympic team.

11:16

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): In how many directions can the SNP face at one time? On international sport, the answer is clear. Before I get to the guts of my speech I will comment on Bruce McFee's point about the previous winter Olympics. It is no surprise that countries such as Estonia and Norway do better than much larger countries. That is obvious, given that the winter Olympics was designed for the Nordic countries and the sports in which they compete. It is no

surprise that Estonia and Norway will probably do better than even the United States of America, given the sports that comprise the winter Olympics.

We are debating the summer Olympics in 2012. Let us be honest. The SNP did not want the UK to host the games because—shock, horror—the bid was from London. After two failed bids by Manchester, it was quite clear that the United Kingdom would attract the Olympic games for the third time only if the bid was anchored by London. Those of us who supported that bid should be congratulated and those who did not support it should be condemned; they gave it no support at the time and they are giving it only grudging support now.

It would be useful if, instead of just going on about the 2012 summer Olympics, we got behind Glasgow's bid for the 2014 Commonwealth games. However, the SNP cannot get fully behind even that bid. In *The Press and Journal* last month, Fergus Ewing complained that, yet again, it was the central belt that would get investment and not his particular region. Presumably, some people in the SNP would have preferred the Commonwealth games bid to have come from Inverness. Their approach is, "If it ain't coming from Inverness, we will not get behind Glasgow." That sums up not just the petty nationalism but the petty regionalism that the SNP displays in some aspects of this debate.

Fergus Ewing: This is all very amusing, but will the member answer a serious point that Janette Anderson made recently in the chamber? She said that the decision may be extremely damaging to the Scottish economy because, to meet the huge transport projects for the London Olympics, capacity will be sucked out of Scotland. Does Scott Barrie think, as the First Minister does, that Janette Anderson—the chief executive of First Engineering, which is one of Scotland's leading companies—was, and I quote, "an idiot"?

Scott Barrie: I thank Fergus Ewing for illustrating my point. He is paying only lip service to London's successful bid for the 2012 Olympics and he does not want Glasgow to get the 2014 Commonwealth games.

International sport is a complex issue and there is an interesting question about whether people should compete—as we want them to—for the joy of competing in sport at all levels or whether they want to compete at the highest level. That question is sewn up in the Olympic games, given that in some sports some people are clearly head and shoulders above the rest.

Tennis is a sport that is only tenuously linked to the Olympics. It is clear that our number 1 tennis player in Scotland will soon be the number 1

tennis player in the United Kingdom. He competed in his first Davis cup last month, although unfortunately he did not play to his best. However, the only way in which he will ever be able to compete at international level is through a GB team. That goes not just for tennis but for a load of other sports, because we require a critical mass—

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I apologise for being late, Presiding Officer.

As a point of information, in the Davis cup the GB team is now relegated to second or third ranking. I ask the member not to be a narrow nationalist when he talks about sport. He should talk about whether a Scottish team would engender a greater sporting performance in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Barrie, you should be finishing now.

Scott Barrie: I do not wish to correct Margo MacDonald, but she will realise that Britain failed to get promoted in the Davis cup. It is not that we were relegated. There is a slight difference. *[Laughter.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Scott Barrie: People are laughing, but if they knew anything about the Davis cup they would know that we were competing to get promoted into the world league, not to get relegated from it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Barrie, you should be finishing now.

Scott Barrie: The point is that the SNP is not fully behind the London bid and is not even fully behind the Glasgow bid.

11:21

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Not only do we support the Executive's amendment, but we seek to avoid generalisations. I say that because, over the years, everything is changing. For example, tug-of-war, in which parliamentarians would excel, has been given up as an Olympic sport, as have cricket and that great Scottish game, golf; not to mention rugby, rink hockey and rackets. In the ancient Olympic games, married women were not allowed to participate or to watch but unmarried women could attend the competition and Demeter, goddess of fertility, was given a privileged position next to the stadium altar. I am reassured that we live in more modern times and that those ancient practices have disappeared into oblivion.

This morning, we should place our whole-hearted support behind Scottish sportsmen and women, recognising the supreme value of sport in promoting good health, improving self-esteem and fostering a strong sense of community and

teamwork. My conviction is that Hampden Park could play host to Olympic football; Fort William, which hosted the world mountain biking championships, seems ideal for an Olympic mountain biking competition; Gleneagles could be suited to equestrian pursuits; and many Scottish rivers could host the canoeing and kayaking events.

Many sports have traditionally been played at British level and I see nothing wrong with Scottish athletes succeeding at that level. Just because Scottish athletes compete for the United Kingdom under the union jack does not mean that they cease to be Scots or that Scotland can no longer claim them for our own. We can be proud of the successes of Kelly Holmes on the athletics track and of Matthew Pinsent, who powered his way to victory on the water.

We need to encourage participation in sport at all levels and to provide support for elite athletes to fulfil their potential. We should welcome the outstanding successes of Scots Shirley Robertson and Chris Hoy with their gold medals in sailing and cycling, and Katherine Grainger and Campbell Walsh with their silver medals in rowing and kayaking.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will give way, but only briefly, because I have a lot to say.

Alasdair Morgan: Does Lord James agree that, if there is logic guiding us towards an all-Britain Olympic team, that same logic should lead to an all-Britain Commonwealth games team?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: At the outset of my remarks I said that we should avoid generalisations. The scene is changing all the time and many sports have been given up. I would look at each case on its specific merits. Traditionally, there has been United Kingdom participation in the Olympics and I see nothing wrong with Scots succeeding at British level.

As Jamie McGrigor suggested, the fear is that if we were to go it alone, we could in some sports face reduced resources for facilities and coaching expertise. Michael Matheson does not intend it, but that could mean that we sent fewer athletes to the games and that fewer athletes qualified. Participation on a more modest scale might weaken enthusiasm for and interest in Scotland's participation, whereas we want to provide the best possible support through resources, facilities and coaching.

Jamie McGrigor made an unanswerable argument by quoting Chris Hoy, the cycling gold medallist, who said:

"I think if we do that it would dilute the resources and the expertise we've got in the British team."

Jamie McGrigor did not mention another quotation from Chris Hoy:

"I'm a very proud Scot, but I'm also proud to be British and I think they don't have to be mutually exclusive."

We want an outward-looking patriotism, to which we strongly subscribe. The Executive should give sports top priority and encourage all efforts to ensure that competitive sport is available to all children in Scotland. For those reasons, we support the Executive's amendment. We wish our athletes every good fortune.

11:26

Patricia Ferguson: My colleague George Lyon said that the previous debate was rather like "Groundhog Day". I assure him that this debate was not like "Groundhog Day"; instead, the SNP has made a political volte-face and has suddenly decided that, for its own ends only, it will support the London 2012 Olympics.

The debate has been interesting. Executive members and some Opposition members have taken the motion and the amendments seriously and have spoken to them, but the SNP—other than Michael Matheson—has given us more of the same. In that respect, perhaps George Lyon had a point.

Jamie McGrigor is right: the debate was politically motivated. The SNP has made a cynical attempt to fill a policy gap with an idea that it thought would attract quick and easy headlines. I say to Jamie McGrigor and Lord James Douglas-Hamilton that the Executive's ambition does not stop at the Olympics or the Commonwealth games. We constantly work hard to bring major sporting events to the country. We want to and have spread the benefit of those events around the country—into the constituencies of Mr Ewing and others. Our ambition is for the whole of Scotland. It is that everyone in Scotland should enjoy watching and participating in games and that our young people should be motivated.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Patricia Ferguson: I will not as I am short of time.

It is all very well for Mr Ewing to say that I should play the ball and not the man. I am sorry, but that will not do as a smokescreen for his trying to cover up the fact that the portion of my speech to which he referred simply quoted his comments and those of his colleagues back at him. He cannot say one thing in *The Press and Journal* at one time of year and try in the chamber to portray his ideas, policies and principles differently.

Fergus Ewing: Will the minister give way?

Patricia Ferguson: I will not; the member has had his opportunity.

Our challenge is to increase the number of Scots who participate and win in the Olympic games. Just having our own team to represent Scotland would not necessarily mean that the number of participants increased. The IOC sets a challenging qualifying mark in every event and it is up to athletes to qualify. In all cases, no matter for whom participants compete, they must still achieve that mark. We are conscious of that. We try to ensure that as many as possible of our athletes reach that mark. I am explaining to the SNP why its theory is redundant.

I take issue with Colin Fox's point that perhaps rugby and the Commonwealth games did not have the mass participation of football or the Olympic games. However, if he considers that more than 70 nations compete in the Commonwealth games, he will realise that what he said does not apply to that.

Bruce McFee and others have failed to understand the point about football and other sports. My colleague Scott Barrie made the point clearly and well in his speech. Of course we will compete whenever competitions take place. As I said in my opening speech, the fact that the devolution settlement means that we are responsible for some aspects of policy and that the Westminster Government is responsible for others is an analogy for how we can work in the same way throughout sport in competition. The two arrangements are not mutually exclusive. It is entirely possible for Scotland to compete on its own in the Commonwealth games and in football.

Stewart Stevenson: All sport is devolved.

Patricia Ferguson: All sport is of course devolved, which is why our commitment is to all sport and why we want our athletes and those who play our sports to compete at the highest level whenever they can.

The important point about the debate is that we will not be deflected by a narrow nationalist argument from our aim of more people participating in sport and more of our athletes competing internationally at every level. We will support our athletes, who have said that they want to compete in team GB, in their aspiration. We will also support them when they stand on podiums and win medals, whether they are for Scotland, for their region or for GB. We will support them all. I look forward very much to seeing several of our athletes on podiums to receive medals in 2006 at the winter Olympics in Turin and at the Commonwealth games in Melbourne.

11:31

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): When I close a debate, I normally respond to arguments that I have heard. However, it is more important today to lay out some of the facts. Fact number 1 is from the International Olympic Committee. It says:

“Although most”

national Olympic committees

“are from nations, the IOC also recognises independent territories, commonwealths, protectorates and geographical areas. There are currently 202 NOCs, ranging from Albania to Zimbabwe.”

Of those 202, 13 represent states that the UN does not yet recognise. They include American Samoa, Aruba, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Cook Islands, Guam, Hong Kong, Netherlands Antilles, which is a devolved Netherlands region, Puerto Rico and Taiwan.

The Olympic charter requires a national Olympic committee to have a jurisdiction that covers the country that it is in. Fact: the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland already covers Scotland and provides the structure for teams to compete in the Commonwealth games, so there is no reason why it cannot co-ordinate an Olympic team. We need at least five national sports federations that are affiliated to their international counterparts to be members of our national Olympic committee. We can count them off easily; I counted 25 without an awful lot of bother.

When the idea was suggested in the summer, the Executive said that the decision was up to the International Olympic Committee—but we must ask it first. The committee will not run to Scotland and say, “Please form a national Olympic committee because we want to give your country funds to promote sport and to involve young people more.” It is sad that the Executive has not even approached the committee with a view to considering the options for Scotland.

The minister who is responsible for sport stressed yet again the need for young people to be involved in sport and for Scotland to aspire to medal winning and excellence. I will look back at the 2004 Olympic games. Slovakia, with a population of 5.4 million, had 35 competitors. Ireland, with a population of 4 million, had 48 competitors. Finland's population is 5.2 million and it had 53 competitors. Denmark's population is 5.4 million and it had 92 competitors. Scotland's population is 5 million and it had 22 competitors. Ireland had more than double the number of competitors that we had, although its population is 1 million lower than ours. How on earth does that encourage our young Scottish athletes to aspire to greatness?

I still fail to understand why even to consider the option is such a problem. People from all parties in Scotland could get behind the idea.

Mr McGrigor: What is wrong with a Scottish athlete winning a medal for a British team?

Linda Fabiani: There is nothing wrong with that, but it would be so much better if Scottish athletes could win medals for Scotland in the Olympics as they can in the Commonwealth games.

Even the First Minister realises the importance of standing for one's own country. Following the 2002 Commonwealth games, Jack McConnell said:

"I know that flying the flag for Scotland is a particularly special moment for our sporting stars.

These winners can become role models for young Scots to participate more in sport".

Prior to that, the First Minister had said:

"By raising the profile of sport and showing just what Scotland can achieve on a world stage, these athletes will also provide inspiration for our sporting stars of tomorrow."

Think of the inspiration that might be provided if our athletes could win Olympic medals on the world stage. Think of the encouragement that young Scots could be given if their schools and local sports clubs could tell them that they have the chance to march into Wembley in 2012 under the Scottish flag as part of the Scotland team. That is the kind of aspiration that we could aim at. I am at a loss to understand why that is seen as such a problem.

Patricia Ferguson: Cannot Ms Fabiani understand that children in Scotland can be just as inspired by Kelly Holmes as they might be by Shirley Robertson? We do not need to pick and choose in the nationalistic way that Ms Fabiani has described; we can support our athletes already. Indeed, we can support and be inspired by successful athletes from any country.

Linda Fabiani: I am absolutely certain that, if there were separate Olympic teams for Wales—there is a move for a Welsh team, too—and Scotland, all the teams on the islands that form the UK would support one another. I see no problem with that. However, the healthy competition that would ensue from Scotland, England and Wales having their own Olympic teams would be good for everyone on these islands.

I also find it sad that sportscotland, which is supposed to nurture sporting talent and promote sport in Scotland, has taken the view that it has taken. Despite stating that

"Scots should have the opportunity to aspire to the highest standard of participation that they desire",

sportscotland seems to be unwilling to live up to the ideals of participation that it espouses.

I ask the Executive to give our proposal serious consideration rather than to dismiss it out of hand as some kind of SNP political plot. Some 78 per cent of respondents to a recent survey, which was carried out by the campaign that is now up and running, agreed that Scotland should field its own Olympic team. In every radio programme that I have heard discuss the issue, the overwhelming majority of contributors have agreed on the need for a Scottish team. Therefore, the Executive should at least discuss the option as a possibility rather than reject it out of hand.

Let us consider seriously whether this country could aspire to compete on its own, in partnership with the other countries of the UK, as we move forward to the 2012 Olympics.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:39

Booze and Blade Culture

1. Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to address the so-called “booze and blade” culture in Scotland. (S2O-7780)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):

Violent crime of any kind is unacceptable and the levels of violence in Scotland are a blight on our civilised country. We will tackle the problem through tough new laws to deal with knife crime, including tighter control of sales and tougher sentencing for offences; licensing reforms to place more onus on licensed premises for responsible drinking; supporting the work of Strathclyde police’s violence reduction unit; and supporting community safety partnerships and antisocial behaviour teams in addressing alcohol problems and violence at a local level.

Mr McAveety: I thank the minister for her comprehensive response, which reflects the genuine concern felt by many neighbourhoods and communities throughout Scotland about knife crime and the use of alcohol. Does she agree that too many lives, and too many young lives in particular, are being damaged by the lethal concoction of drink and weapons? Does she recognise that we need real powers, such as those that she outlined, to tackle the problem? Will she assure me that, once legislation is introduced, it will be kept under review over the next few years and that any further action and initiatives that may be required will not be ruled out?

Cathy Jamieson: I absolutely agree that too many young lives are lost through crime. We also have too many young perpetrators of crime who end up in our young offenders institutions and prisons. I assure the member that we will continue to consider what legislative solutions are required.

Biofuels

2. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is encouraging the use of biofuels in light of the level of oil prices. (S2O-7749)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): The Scottish Executive supported the construction of Scotland’s first large-scale biodiesel production plant through

a £1.2 million regional selective assistance grant. The plant is now fully operational. The United Kingdom Government currently applies a 20p per litre fuel duty incentive for biofuels. The Executive is working closely with the UK Government on consideration of potential additional measures to promote biofuels.

Mr Stone: Given that transport is recognised as a major source of carbon emissions, does the minister agree that encouraging farmers and industry to increase the production of biofuel alternatives would greatly benefit the environment as well as help agriculture in the uncertain times that it faces? Will the new measures to which he referred include a reduction in fuel duty for such fuels? Will he at least consider such a reduction and discuss it with colleagues in Westminster?

Allan Wilson: As I said, we are in discussion with UK Government colleagues. I agree that promoting biofuels would produce environmental benefit by reducing the use of fuels that generate carbon emissions. We are considering more generally the impact of fuel duty on climate change. As the member may know, fuel duty rates are lower today than they were in 1999.

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Does the minister agree that Scottish agricultural crops such as soft wheat are ideally suited for the production of biofuels and that it is therefore crucial that the biofuel projects that are encouraged are as informed as possible? Given that the plant belonging to Argent Energy Ltd has received £1.2 million of Scottish Executive money and could be a model for future biofuel projects, will he encourage the company to co-operate in sharing non-confidential information and experience?

Allan Wilson: I agree with the member’s basic premise, but I am unaware of any difficulty over the sharing of information. Biofuels have not been mainstreamed in the UK as they have been in other parts of the globe. Given that production is carried out on a small scale in the UK, higher production levels would decrease storage, distribution and other costs and make biofuels more competitive with conventional fuels. In that respect, I agree fundamentally with the point that the member has made.

Health Spending

3. Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that health spending should be focused on the communities with the poorest health. (S2O-7783)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr): Those with the poorest health are generally found in the most deprived parts of Scotland. The formula used for allocating

resources to national health service boards takes into account relative levels of deprivation. Health improvement policy aims at improving health for all, with a focus on tackling inequalities. The recent report from Professor David Kerr highlighted the differences in life expectancy between the most affluent and least affluent communities. I will provide my full response to Professor Kerr's recommendations on 27 October.

Mr McNeil: Professor Graham Watt of the University of Glasgow has pointed out that good medical care tends to be most available to those who need it least and Professor David Kerr told the Health Committee that current arrangements lead to a widening in health inequalities. Does the minister therefore agree that it is time that we looked again at how funds are distributed so that we stop pouring money into making the healthiest healthier while my constituents are dying in their 50s and 60s?

Mr Kerr: Relative deprivation levels are reflected in the Arbutnott formula and the national resource allocation committee is currently reviewing that issue. I agree with the member that it is simply unacceptable that life expectancy in some communities is drastically less than in the rest of Scotland. I draw members' attention to the work that we are doing—for which our efforts are recognised by the World Health Organisation and throughout the world—around inequality, access to services and making the healthy choice the easy choice, as well as through interventions in schools, including hungry for success and other such initiatives.

I accept Mr McNeil's point, but my response to the Kerr review will take what he says a bit further in relation to how we access those communities. At the moment, there are unmet needs pilots all round Scotland, which are working away to establish why needs are not being met. In Glasgow, the centre for population health is focused on the very issue of why those who need the health service most do not access it. We seek to respond to those individual pieces of information.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Is the minister satisfied that the current health funding formula is addressing health inequalities? How does he measure success or otherwise with that formula? Does he remain convinced that the use of indirect criteria such as deprivation and rurality is appropriate in seeking to change health inequalities?

Mr Kerr: Poor health has many underlying causes, including access to transport, geography, rurality, housing, well-being and employment expectation. All those matters, including damp houses and transport planning, contribute to the problem. What we seek to do, and what the

Arbutnott formula does well, is to try to rank population profile, health profile, age groups of local communities and the well-being of those communities. However, that will never be a perfect science.

As a forward-looking Executive, we are undertaking projects such as the unmet needs pilots, looking to those communities that should be using the services but are not using them. What Kerr tells us is that we need to transfer from the centre of the health service the services that will make a difference to those communities. We should consider our campaigns on breastfeeding and on supervised toothbrushing in nurseries, the hungry for success initiative in primary schools and the work that we are doing on well-being in secondary schools. All those projects are making a real difference for the long term in those communities.

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Does the minister recognise that there are pockets of deprivation and poor health in what are considered to be prosperous urban areas as well as in rural areas? Will he assure me that those areas will not be neglected in considerations of the allocation of future health spending?

Mr Kerr: When Margaret Curran was Minister for Communities, she launched an initiative to provide smaller-area statistics, to allow us to address issues of relative well-being and prosperity, to identify pockets of deprivation throughout Scotland and to focus on areas of hardship and areas that are less well-off. We have those data and that information and we continue to work our services around a knowledge-based policy that will deliver for those communities. That information is available and I am happy to correspond with Nanette Milne on that point.

Local Rail Services

4. Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will support the reopening of small stations on the west coast main line following the Atkins report supporting the case for a new local service to operate between Carlisle and both Glasgow and Edinburgh if possible. (S2O-7803)

The Minister for Transport and Telecommunications (Tavish Scott): The Scottish Executive has already responded to Dumfries and Galloway Council on the west coast main line local services report.

Chris Ballance: I understand the Scottish Executive's position, but does the minister accept the report's conclusion that a local service would bring significant wider benefit, would be strongly integrated with local policy across a number of transport areas, would provide a significant benefit

in wider economic terms and is particularly relevant for an area with significant access issues? Does the Executive accept those findings?

Tavish Scott: If Mr Ballance is familiar with the issues relating to the report, the way in which it was presented and its findings, he will know that it was appraised using the Scottish transport appraisal guidance. That appraisal, as I am sure he is aware, illustrated that there were a number of deficiencies in the report that needed to be addressed. The inaccuracies related particularly to the economic analysis and to the fact that certain risks and uncertainties had not been taken into account. To ensure that the report is full, comprehensive and complete, Dumfries and Galloway Council must consider those issues. We reported those matters to the council on 30 June and we still await a response to those specific aspects. Once those matters are cleared up, I would be content to consider the wider issues that Mr Ballance has raised in relation to developing rail strategy projects generally.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): The minister will be aware of my on-going concerns about the apparent secrecy that has surrounded the whole process. I share some of his concerns about the report. I seek clarification and assurance that the inadequacy of the report does not confer any inadequacy on the case for those rail services. I would welcome an opportunity to discuss with him how we can move the issue forward and bring in other local authorities and—just as important—the public, who have been the missing component in the survey. The figures and information that appear in the report certainly do not add up to the information that I have on the ground.

Tavish Scott: I would be happy to discuss those matters with Karen Gillon. She raises some important points about the wider implications and how best to develop the issues. I am sure that she would expect me to ensure that the analysis is robust and complete. I will be happy to examine the specific issues that she has raised with regard to the report and to consider how best to progress, through putting the project in the overall context of public investment in our public transport systems.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister agree that one of the constraints on introducing local services on the west coast line is the difficulty, due to capacity constraints, of running slower local services along with faster intercity services? Does he also agree that that constraint is increasingly affecting freight traffic, both on the west coast main line and on the diversionary line through the Nith valley? Does he share my long-term objective of increasing the capacity on both those major trunk routes?

Tavish Scott: Mr Morgan makes an eminently sensible point about the basic contradiction

between three different desires that I am sure we all share in relation to freight, fast point-to-point passenger links and the inevitably slower commuter links. The route utilisation assessment that is currently under way is considering how best we can use the track that is available to meet those at times conflicting requirements of our rail infrastructure system. I would be happy to consider the specific issues that he has raised on the overall capacity of the routes, but one of the important aspects of the current route utilisation assessment is that it will seek to point up where the constraints are and consider how to address those issues.

Land Management Contracts

5. Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what social and environmental benefits it anticipates from land management contracts. (S2O-7806)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): The type of social benefits that will be delivered by the LMC menu scheme will include increased public enjoyment of the countryside from the provision of better access, a more skilled workforce that benefits from training, and increased public understanding of land management issues. It will also deliver a broad range of environmental benefits, such as enhanced biodiversity, better water quality and landscape improvements.

Eleanor Scott: I am sure that the minister will agree—and that he will have reaffirmed in the revised organic action plan—that organic farming's holistic approach delivers many of the benefits that land management contracts are looking for. However, the rules are written in such a way that some organic farmers find it difficult to tick the boxes. Does he agree that organic status conferred by a recognised certification body should give automatic entry to tier 2, and probably to tier 3, of land management contracts?

Ross Finnie: I am not sure about automatic entry, but I certainly think that the rules should enable organic farmers to gain equal access to those schemes. I certainly do not wish to anticipate the outcome of any consultation on the precise formula for tier 3, as that would be inappropriate. However, I am convinced that all those menu schemes were well designed. As Eleanor Scott will be aware, 11 of the 17 current options are environmental and we continue to discuss with stakeholders, including organic stakeholders, how we can finesse and refine what has been a groundbreaking scheme.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the land management schemes do not give people sufficient encouragement to plant woodland? As

we are concerned about climate change, we should be using the land management contracts to plant woodland and to grow biomass.

Ross Finnie: I can think of at least two schemes that are specifically designed to encourage afforestation. The LMC menu scheme is groundbreaking. There will be a minor review this year and there will have to be a further review before we start the rural development programme in 2007. The member has in the past mentioned the increased importance of short-rotation coppices, which I am open to including in the review. However, the current scheme does not exclude encouragement for forestry.

A68 (Environmental Impact Assessment)

6. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will consider carrying out an up-to-date environmental impact assessment of the A68 Dalkeith bypass, in light of other infrastructure changes that have been implemented or planned in the Lothians since 1996. (S2O-7739)

The Minister for Transport and Telecommunications (Tavish Scott): The statutory processes for the road are complete. However, the department is currently updating the baseline environmental information. The mitigation measures previously developed for the scheme will therefore be updated and incorporated into the design.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I warmly welcome what the minister says, but does he agree that the Borders rail link proposal and other developments will substantially alter the transport infrastructure? Would a more up-to-date environmental impact assessment be advisable in view of the incredibly lengthy delay?

Tavish Scott: The incredibly lengthy delay started when Lord James Douglas-Hamilton was the transport minister. I welcome the Conservatives' support for the Borders rail project, which will provide considerable benefits to Midlothian as well as to the Borders. I repeat the central point on the baseline environmental information. It is important that we get that right and ensure that it is properly assessed. I assure Lord James that, when that is done, I will make him aware of the contents.

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): The minister will be aware that the strategic roads review in 1999 said of the A68 Dalkeith bypass that there were

"generally negative ratings on ... environmental factors, including global air quality, water, ecology, visual impacts, heritage and landscape character."

The review recommended that a multimodal appraisal be carried out to compare the benefits of

the A68 Dalkeith bypass with other ways of tackling congestion and pollution in Dalkeith town centre. Why has that multimodal review not been carried out to compare the benefits of the bypass with other transport alternatives to meet the needs of the people of Dalkeith, as was envisaged in the 1999 strategic roads review from the Executive, of which the minister is a member?

Tavish Scott: I am disappointed that Mr Ballard has got it wrong at two question times—he tried to suggest that course of action previously. The Greens appear to be against a measure that would dramatically improve congestion in Dalkeith. They cannot have it both ways. Mr Ballard needs to be clear that the economics presented during the strategic roads review showed that the scheme provides value for money within a net present value of £14.5 million and a benefit to cost ratio of 2.25. It is important to recognise that, because it includes assessments of environmental considerations. In addition, as I said to Lord James a moment ago, the environmental baseline information is being updated. Those matters are important, but the crucial aspect is the ability to tackle congestion in Dalkeith, which is exactly what the bypass will do.

M74 Extension (Costs)

7. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what its current estimate is for the cost of the M74 motorway extension. (S2O-7804)

The Minister for Transport and Telecommunications (Tavish Scott): The cost of the scheme is expected to lie within the range £375 million to £500 million.

Patrick Harvie: At the risk of hearing the minister again defend the Executive's obsession with road building, may I ask him whether the current cost of the project—which has never been subject to a multimodal study—includes additional security elements resulting from any direct action that may take place? Does it account for inflation since the cost estimate was originally made? Does it take account of any problems arising from construction capacity moving south because of the London Olympics? If not, the M74 extension is looking increasingly as if it offers poor value for money compared with other Glasgow projects, such as Glasgow crossrail, which have never had the same kind of political momentum behind them.

Tavish Scott: The devolved Government is proud of spending more on public transport projects than has ever been spent before. That is important to us and we have moved our policy forward in a progressive way to tackle Scotland's rail and public transport needs and to strike a balance between road and rail. Mr Harvie is, not for the first time, completely wrong in his

assessment of our transport plans. In answer to his ridiculous question about direct action, I can tell him that those are operational matters for the police. It would be extraordinary to be drawn into a we're-all-doomed analysis. It is important to keep a sense of perspective on the matter, which is what we are doing.

First Minister's Question Time

12:02

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer (George Reid): Do you insist on it being taken now?

Margo MacDonald: I would prefer it to be taken now.

The Presiding Officer: Please be brief.

Margo MacDonald: I do not want to interrupt First Minister's question time, but members will notice that question 2, which was to be put by the leader of the second Opposition party, the Conservatives, has been withdrawn. Standing order 13.7.4 is inadequate for such contingencies. The question was not to be asked by an individual member; it was reserved for the leader of one of the Opposition parties.

I understand that Mr McLetchie is, sadly, attending to a family matter. However, in this instance, I would like to claim the spot. As independents, we never get the chance.

The Presiding Officer: Order. The important fact is that Mr McLetchie has had to attend to a close family bereavement. You are quite right: under standing order 13.7.4, the question cannot be substituted. What I intend to do today is take in a supplementary slot and give Annabel Goldie two questions. As for the independents, Ms MacDonald, you will find that they get more than their fair share across the course.

Cabinet (Meetings)

1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-1851)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): At the next meeting of the Cabinet we will discuss our progress in implementing our partnership agreement.

On a lighter note, Presiding Officer, I welcome—"note" might be the appropriate word—Stéphane Denève, the new resident director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, who is with us in the gallery today. He has come from Paris to live in Glasgow, and he is very welcome. He will, I am sure, entertain us in the years to come, just as he entertained us at the opening concert last Friday night. [*Applause.*]

Nicola Sturgeon: I echo that warm welcome.

I draw the First Minister's attention to remarks made in this week's *Sunday Herald* by the Minister

for Health and Community Care. He said that when he took on his job a year ago he was "horrified" by the state of the Scottish Executive Health Department. Is the mess that Andy Kerr discovered in the Health Department down simply to the incompetence of the previous two Labour health ministers, or does the First Minister accept some of the responsibility?

The First Minister: I am afraid that, just as she likes to quote statistics out of context, Ms Sturgeon likes to quote words out of context. She ignores the considerable progress that has been made in the health service in Scotland, not just since 1997 or 1999 but, crucially, in the past 12 months—particularly with out-patients. Some day, at some point, Ms Sturgeon will stand in the chamber and congratulate the doctors, nurses and other staff in our health service on their considerable achievements. If she would do so just occasionally, she might perform better in by-elections.

Nicola Sturgeon: I have no problem with congratulating doctors and nurses: it is with the incompetence of the Scottish Executive that I have a big problem.

I remind the First Minister that the Health Department that so horrified Andy Kerr had as one of its responsibilities that of setting up NHS 24. I remind him also of a report that was published yesterday on the problems at NHS 24. The report said that the service was overwhelmed by members of the public who, instead of using it just for emergencies, were phoning at any time, day or night, for any reason. However, is that not exactly the kind of service that the First Minister and his ministers told the public that NHS 24 was there to provide? Is it not the case that the real problem is not the high expectations of the public but the failure of the Executive to deliver on its promises?

The First Minister: I find it hard to see how Ms Sturgeon can criticise the commissioning of an independent review into the performance of NHS 24, which was causing concern to all the parties in the chamber, as well as causing concern in the Health Department and to the Minister for Health and Community Care. The independent review has concluded with a proper report that contains a series of recommendations. The Minister for Health and Community Care has accepted every single recommendation and is ensuring that the Health Department and those responsible for NHS 24 start to work on those recommendations with as much speed as is physically and intellectually possible. At the end of the day, Ms Sturgeon feels that that is not an appropriate course of action, but it is the right way for us to behave.

NHS 24 is an important service. It facilitates use of the health services and it should give people the best possible advice in the quickest possible

circumstances. It has not been doing that, but it will. As the recommendations have been accepted, they will be implemented.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am asking questions about the mismanagement of NHS 24 that made an inquiry and report necessary in the first place. I remind the First Minister how the service, which we are now told is for dire emergencies only, was described by the minister who launched it as an all-day, everyday service, not just for emergencies but for guidance, information, advice and reassurance. However, far from delivering what was promised, this lifeline service was, according to the report,

"not far short of chaos"

by last Christmas.

Is not NHS 24 a classic Labour mix of spin, hype and basic incompetence when it comes to delivery? Is it not the case that NHS 24 has been a major public policy disaster and that the First Minister should do the decent thing, accept responsibility and say that he is sorry?

The First Minister: Ms Sturgeon is about six months too late with her argument. We announced the review, which has now been concluded. Every single recommendation contained in the review has been accepted by the minister and speedy implementation of the recommendations is now under way. NHS 24 is not for dire emergencies only, but it should not be misused for run-of-the-mill requests that can be answered in other ways. It is important that, whatever the request from a member of the public, NHS 24 is able to give top-quality advice accurately and speedily and that the member of the public gets the best possible treatment from a hospital, general practitioner or other facility. That is the objective and it is what, in a large number of cases, NHS 24 has managed to provide during the past few years. However, in far too many cases, the service fell short. There are staffing problems and there have been real issues with the management, and those problems and issues have been addressed by the review. As I said, every single recommendation has been accepted and I back the Minister for Health and Community Care in making sure that they are now speedily implemented.

Nicola Sturgeon: It was not the staff who fell short; it was the Executive. I remind the First Minister that the last time that I raised the issue, he said that he had taken responsibility for it by setting up an inquiry. That has now concluded and one of its conclusions was that the Executive's Health Department did not have a grip on NHS 24. I agree that it is important to support the professionals in getting it right in future, but surely what is missing is an apology from the First Minister for getting it so wrong in the past.

The First Minister: It becomes like déjà vu every week. The reality is that a review was required; there was serious public and, indeed, political demand for it. The review has been conducted and it makes several clear recommendations, each one of which has been accepted by the Minister for Health and Community Care, who is now moving to make sure that they are implemented.

Of course, on such occasions, Ms Sturgeon prefers never to look forward to the future, never to ensure that the service improves, never to back the decisions that require to be taken to ensure that the service improves, and never ever to come up with a constructive idea that would improve the service. She prefers always to look backwards and to criticise those who were involved, and always to gloat and to blame someone else. The reality is that our health service must move forward and find new ways of delivering health services. That is what we are doing, and we will ensure that NHS 24 is a central and successful part of the service in years to come.

The Presiding Officer: For the reasons that I gave earlier, question 2 is withdrawn and therefore falls, but I will go straight to supplementaries and give two questions to Annabel Goldie.

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): On numerous occasions, the First Minister has asserted his Executive's commitment to business in Scotland. Indeed, I believe that it is still the priority priority of the Cabinet under the much-chanted mantra of a smart, successful Scotland. Does he think that yesterday's figures for manufactured export sales were a hiccup, an aberration or a direct consequence of the Executive's muddle-headed policies, such as abolishing the uniform business rate?

The First Minister: That is muddle-headed thinking. It may have escaped the notice of the Scottish Conservatives—these days they are distracted almost annually by other things—but there have been worldwide changes in manufacturing that have affected every country in the developed world. We face huge challenges, not just from eastern Europe—the challenge that we faced in the early years of devolution—but from China, India and other emerging Asian economies. Those challenges will be met only if we in Scotland invest in our skills and knowledge and in partnerships—not just between business and education inside Scotland, but between businesses in this country and businesses in the emerging economies. Although the figures for manufacturing are as disappointing this week as they have been regularly over recent years, because of significant international changes and, in particular, the change in the international electronics industry, the work that we are doing is the best way of preparing Scotland and of

ensuring that we have a competitive position in the global market in the years to come.

Miss Goldie: The problem for the First Minister is one of trust. The business community is being asked to believe in an Executive that removed the uniform business rate, has presided over a slump in manufacturing and is led by a First Minister who reportedly disparaged two leading businesspeople who criticised Executive policy by calling them idiots. How can business take the Executive seriously when, apart from uttering insults, all that it has done for business is to introduce its promised business rate reduction—so we are told—by instalments? Does he not realise that Scottish businesses have already paid £838 million more than their counterparts in England? That figure could be £1 billion by the time that parity is restored. Is that not more weak-kneed and spineless than smart and successful?

The First Minister: Never could a description be further from the truth. The reality in Scotland is that in the post-devolution years the relationship between Government and business in Scotland—which is a genuine relationship and a partnership—has never been better or stronger. That is the case because the devolved Government listens to Scottish business, acts on its concerns and ensures that the practical action and allocation of resources that we decide make a difference for it.

When Scottish business tells us that we must invest in transport, to repair the disinvestment and decay of the Tory years, we decide to do that by increasing transport spending and investing in roads and railways and in direct air routes that allow our businesspeople to make international connections without having to go through London or Amsterdam, as they did for so many years. Scottish business tells us that it wants us to invest in universities, colleges, schools and the skills of our people. That is precisely what we do, by providing increases in investment in our universities and colleges of more than 25 per cent in the next three years.

The partnerships will make a difference. I could provide an endless list of ideas from our business community that we have implemented. That is why Scotland has the highest employment rate in the United Kingdom and why Scotland's position in the global market is stronger than it has been for a very long time. That is why, when we develop international partnerships, we are welcomed elsewhere, because the knowledge and skills that we can contribute can make a difference and will create jobs in Scotland in the years to come.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

3. Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the First Minister when he will

next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to discuss. (S2F-1858)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I have no immediate plans to meet the secretary of state, but I speak with him regularly on a wide range of issues.

Shiona Baird: Two weeks ago, the First Minister told students from Drumchapel that he wanted a protocol to be put in place to protect children whom the Home Office wishes to remove. He said that that would apply to children under 16 years of age. Does he know that, under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all those under 18 years old are considered to be children? Will he confirm that the Executive, unlike the United Kingdom Government, still recognises the rights of all children up to the age of 18 under the convention?

The First Minister: Yes, of course I know that, but I also believe that there is particular concern about families with youngsters under the age of 16 for whom deportation or removal from Scotland is impending. In such situations, it is important that we have an agreement with the Home Office about how the families—and, in particular, their children and their children's peers in local schools and the community—are treated.

Two successful meetings between our officials and Home Office officials have been held on the subject since I first raised the matter two weeks ago. We are making progress; we intend to make progress, and we will do so with the right principles in mind.

Shiona Baird: I am disappointed that the First Minister did not endorse the rights of the child under the convention. He should remember that the mace in front of him is there to remind all of us of the founding principles of the Parliament, perhaps the highest of which is compassion.

One week ago, the First Minister told the chamber that he would ensure that

"we in Scotland have a regime that ensures ... that the system operates humanely."—[*Official Report*, 29 September 2005; c 19655.]

All of us—in the chamber and across Scotland—agree that the current system is inhumane. Will his protocol permit those raids to continue, or will it end them?

The First Minister: I reiterate what I said last Thursday; I think that I said it very clearly indeed. I believe, and I hope that the majority of responsible politicians in Scotland believe, that there should be an immigration system. I believe that if a country has an immigration system, the decisions that are taken in that system need to be consistent. I further believe that those decisions should be taken speedily, although that does not happen in

too many instances at the moment. Once a decision is made that someone does not have the legal right to remain in the country, they have to be removed. However, when they are removed, I believe that that should be done humanely, as probably happens in the vast majority of cases at the moment.

However, there have been cases in which the method of removal has been questioned. I would like our education and social work services to be involved in cases that involve children in Scotland. That would ensure that the rights of the children, and the concerns of the youngsters with whom the children have had close contact in the community—sometimes for more than just a couple of years—are taken on board. That is the best way for us to proceed.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): As the First Minister said, the huge problem with the system arises when people are not removed speedily and so become part of our communities. He will also remember the fact that the Home Office declared an amnesty back in 2003 for families in such situations. When he speaks to the Home Office about his proposed protocol, will he also seek consideration of an amnesty for families who have been in Scotland for some time and who, through no fault of their own, are torn away from the country that they now consider their home?

The First Minister: It is difficult to advocate a general position on the matter. None of us knows either the circumstances of the individuals who may be affected by such a decision or what it might lead to in this country and elsewhere. I believe that it is wrong that families have to wait in this country for several years until such time as a decision is made on their application. The youngsters in those families then have to leave the young people with whom they have formed friendships in what are their formative years.

Such situations are not always the fault of the state and the system; they sometimes arise because of the way in which people have resisted the implementation of decisions. Whoever is responsible, those situations should not continue. I support fully any moves in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom to speed up the system. When decisions are taken, I hope that those responsible will always take into account the fact that the youngsters have been in this country for some time. I believe that the welfare of the youngsters and of those who have become their friends is, and should be, important to us.

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP): Does the First Minister not find it a bit of a contradiction that he is scouring the world looking for fresh talent when the freshest of talent—namely the Pilana family, the Ikolo family, the Ay family and now the Vucaj

family—is being brutalised and kicked out of Scotland?

The First Minister: It is very wrong of the Scottish Socialist Party and others to portray Scotland in that way. I believe that we need an immigration and asylum system; however, in some decisions made under such a system, some people will not be legally entitled to remain in the country. If that is the case, those individuals will have to leave. The same system has to operate in any country around the globe.

In Scotland, we have the best record not just in the UK but probably across western Europe in integrating people who have come from elsewhere. In Glasgow, in particular, and in other areas, we have an excellent record in ensuring that young people attend local schools, are integrated and successfully make a contribution. We should boast about that record instead of using individual examples in the way that Ms Kane has to depict this country as an unwelcoming place. It is not.

Reoffending (Impact of Mandatory Drug Testing)

4. Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what effect mandatory drug testing is anticipated to have on reducing reoffending. (S2F-1862)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): For certain offences, we will introduce through the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced on Monday, the mandatory drug testing of people arrested by the police. That measure will allow us to identify problematic drug users and to direct them into treatment services. We can make a direct impact on crime by addressing the levels of drug use and breaking the cycle of continued offending, punishment and reoffending.

Bristow Muldoon: I agree that the measure will reduce reoffending rates, but will the First Minister assure me that individuals who have not yet come to the attention of law enforcement agencies will still have full access to drug rehabilitation programmes?

The First Minister: It is important not only that there are proper rehabilitation programmes for those who have committed offences or, in this case, for those who are accused of committing offences but that people who have not committed offences but who need and want treatment are able to receive it. This summer, the Deputy Minister for Justice announced a £4 million increase in funding for drug treatment and rehabilitation services, which I think will create an additional 2,000 places. Such a measure must be welcomed, given the representations that have

been made in the chamber and across Scotland on the need to improve rehabilitation services. Those improvements are on the way, and I hope that more and more people will take up the services.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Is the First Minister aware that more than 70 per cent of youth offenders have a history of drug and alcohol abuse? If mandatory drug testing and the rehabilitation of offenders are to be effective, rehabilitation services will need the capacity to deal with the matter. What steps will the Executive take to address that issue, especially in rural areas, where the services lack such capacity?

The First Minister: I do not have specific figures for the allocations that were made to each part of Scotland this summer, but they were designed to ensure that good proposals to fill any gaps in provision would be taken forward. Many parts of rural Scotland have made representations on this problem. After meeting families who have been affected, I realise that there can be no worse situation for a mother or father to be in than to have a youngster who cannot get into rehabilitation because there is a waiting list. We need to improve the capacity of services, to ensure that they are more widely available across Scotland and that they are more effective for young people who have decided to get off drugs.

Official Visit to Canada

5. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what objectives he has set for his forthcoming visit to Canada. (S2F-1854)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): When I visit the United States and Canada during the last week in October, I will meet business people, politicians, academics, students and, in particular, the Scottish diaspora in Canada to promote Scotland and encourage investment in the Scottish economy.

Alex Neil: I suggest that the First Minister visits Alberta to see how that province has used its oil wealth to tackle problems of poverty and deprivation. Unlike in Scotland, where a quarter of children live on or near the poverty line, Alberta has practically no child poverty. Will he learn the lesson that it is not greedy to use one's oil wealth to relieve poverty and deprivation among one's own people?

The First Minister: We have a new conductor for our Royal Scottish National Orchestra and I hope that he will play some new tunes rather than the same old tunes that we hear from the SNP. I am afraid that such arguments may have been a legitimate part of political debate back in the 1970s, when Alex Neil was a member of at least

two other parties, but we now live in the 21st century.

We cannot bring back the oil wealth that was wasted by the characters in the Conservative party who used it to pay for unemployment and social decay in the 1980s and 1990s. Today we can ensure that our energy industries are modernised, can compete internationally and do not just remove and then use the oil wealth that still exists in the North sea, but use the skills that they have developed to expand their activities into other parts of the world. That should be our ambitious challenge for the 21st century. We should not hark back to an old debate involving old figures and the money that was wasted by the Tories. Instead, we should use our resources, skills and brainpower to ensure that we reduce poverty to even lower levels than those that we have reduced it to today.

Avian Influenza

6. Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): To ask the First Minister whether preparations to combat the impact of a possible avian influenza pandemic are well advanced. (S2F-1857)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Yes—plans are well advanced to prepare for a possible outbreak of human pandemic influenza. However, pandemic planning is an on-going piece of work and our plans will continue to evolve as new information and advice emerge.

The United Kingdom health departments, which are at the forefront of preparations for pandemic flu, continue to keep a close watch over developments in consultation with Health Protection Scotland, the World Health Organisation and the Health Protection Agency.

Euan Robson: I am grateful to the First Minister for that comprehensive reply, but in view of the continuing publicity about a pandemic in the international media, will he consider scheduling after the recess a ministerial statement on preparations and the production of an information leaflet for the Scottish public?

The First Minister: There are two parts to that question. In relation to the public, I understand that a leaflet is being prepared for use in general practitioner surgeries throughout Scotland and that information is already widely available on the Executive's website. We will constantly monitor the potential for producing further publicity and information, to ensure that people are aware of the latest developments and preparations.

However, we are dealing with an uncertain situation, so there needs to be some flexibility in arrangements because the information can and will change as time goes by. Everything that can be done to prepare for the eventuality to which the

member refers is being done and I am sure that the Minister for Health and Community Care will be only too happy to ensure that Parliament is kept up to date with the latest developments, whether through a statement to Parliament, a presentation to committee or some other means.

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I am aware that the Scottish Executive has ordered a sufficient number of courses of antiviral products to treat 25 per cent of the population, which is what the WHO recommends in the event of an influenza pandemic. Can the First Minister give me any indication of when those products will be in our possession?

The First Minister: I am not sure when they will be in our possession, but I am aware that they have been ordered. We must be aware that, until such a human pandemic begins, we will not have access to the strain of influenza that is causing the pandemic. Although it is possible to order drugs and to prepare for an outbreak in some respects, we must be conscious that it will not be possible to resolve the challenge immediately because, from wherever in the world a strain starts to encroach, scientists will need to work on it as soon as that happens.

12:29

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Finance and Public Services and Communities

Working Time Directive (Public Services)

1. Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure that public services will not be adversely affected by implementation of the European working time directive and other negotiated reductions in staff contact time with the public. (S2O-7757)

The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon): Proposed amendments to the European working time directive are still under discussion and several aspects of the proposals are far from clear. It is not possible to predict how long it will take to reach a final agreement. However, I assure the member that ministerial colleagues and I are working closely with United Kingdom ministers and that we support their efforts to retain the flexibility of the opt-out. We also welcome the European Commission's proposals on clarifying on-call time and the timing of compensatory rest.

Mr Ingram: Does the minister concede that too often such workforce issues are becoming drivers of service change as opposed to the desire to meet the needs and wants of the public for service improvement? That is well illustrated by current proposals to centralise accident and emergency services in the national health service, which could lead to the loss of vital services such as those provided by the accident and emergency department at Ayr hospital. Why should short-term staff recruitment and retention problems shape the long-term structure of public services in such a way?

George Lyon: As I said in my initial response, ministerial colleagues and I are working closely with UK ministers and we support their efforts to retain the flexibility of the opt-out. On the member's point about Ayr hospital, the Commission's proposals on clarifying on-call time and the timing of compensatory rest might go some way towards meeting the concerns that he has raised.

Glasgow Housing Association

2. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether Glasgow Housing Association is on target to improve the housing of its tenants, as promised in the stock transfer agreement. (S2O-7763)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): In the past two years, Glasgow Housing Association has made significant progress in delivering better housing for its tenants. During that time, £160 million has been invested in tenants' homes throughout the city, which has produced benefits such as more than 10,000 homes with new central heating systems, more than 13,000 re-roofed properties, more than 8,000 homes with new kitchens and more than 3,000 homes with new bathrooms. A further £127 million is being invested in the current year, and the GHA is well on track to deliver better housing and stronger communities for its tenants.

Bill Butler: I am sure that members welcome the £160 million that has been invested so far and the £127 million that is still to come, but is the minister satisfied that the GHA has put in place an appropriate level of estate management so that the refurbishment work that has been carried out can be maintained to a decent standard and the substantial investment is protected? Does the Executive monitor that vital aspect of the GHA's work?

Johann Lamont: Bill Butler makes an important point about estate management. Often, things that are external to people's houses can have the greatest impact on them and can be as important as the quality of the housing. Indeed, there has sometimes been a failure of investment in things that are external to homes. We know of communities that are in decline in which the houses are exactly the same kind of houses as there are in flourishing communities in other places. It is impossible to overstate the importance of estate management and dealing with the fabric of houses.

I am aware that the GHA understands and appreciates that. Indeed, it is to be applauded for the commitment and priority that it has given to the neighbourhood relations team, which absolutely understands that the quality of houses and people's living accommodation can be severely damaged if external things are not addressed. Obviously, as a result of the key role of tenants in community ownership, they have brought that matter to the attention of those who provide homes.

On Bill Butler's final point, Communities Scotland has an important role to play in regulating, monitoring and supporting all housing

associations, a key part of which is understanding the important issues that have been described.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): The minister will be aware that the GHA's second-stage transfer to local housing organisations is now in doubt, following the UK Government's agreement to the European Commission's ruling, which classifies social landlords as public bodies and means that tendering will now become Europe-wide. Will the minister confirm that that is, indeed, the situation? What will she do about it? Does the position not—as we have always said—leave the stock transfer in chaos?

Johann Lamont: It would be wonderful if Sandra White would come to Glasgow, at least on one occasion, and recognise the huge investment that is being made in its housing. It seems that, for as long as stock transfer has been referred to, her abiding campaign has been to make the people of Glasgow feel that it cannot and will not work. The evidence is that it can work and will work.

On her point about procurement, the fact is that it does not impact on second-stage transfer. The GHA has made it clear that it remains committed to second-stage transfer as a key way of ensuring the involvement of tenants—something that Sandra White and the Scottish National Party resisted even in relation to stock transfer. Clearly, it is a matter for the GHA to address. We are working closely with it and supporting it in considering the best way forward. The legal advice that was given before transfer was sound, and we are confident that second-stage transfer and the involvement of tenants—which is central to stock transfer and the transformation of Glasgow's housing—are still on track.

Efficient Government Initiative

3. Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether all savings secured through its efficient government initiative will be invested in front-line services. (S2O-7786)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): Yes. All the savings that have been realised through our efficient government programme will be reinvested in improving service delivery for the people of Scotland.

Mr Morrison: I am sure that the minister will have noticed that some sections of the media are devoting considerable space to Audit Scotland's response to the initiative. Does the minister have a view on how appropriate those responses are?

Mr McCabe: I am delighted with our engagement with Audit Scotland. In essence, the response has three characteristics, all of which I would expect in a response from a body with Audit Scotland's responsibilities: first, it was challenging;

secondly, it was constructive; and thirdly, it was proportionate. Some Opposition politicians—mainly Scottish National Party and Conservative members—have decided to concentrate on the challenging rather than on the proportionate and the constructive aspects. However, recent election results show that the people of Scotland can see right through that approach and treat those members' response with the contempt that it deserves.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I take the opportunity to give a proportionate response to the minister's previous answer.

Can the minister explain why the Government has taken the view, through the top-slicing of budgets, that local authorities will not be able to redeploy the efficiencies that they make through the efficient government programme on front-line services such as schools or welfare provision, whereas other areas of government have been permitted to do so? Does he accept that that is inequitable and runs the risk of undermining the very front-line services that the efficient government initiative is designed to support?

Mr McCabe: I accept that, by the end of the present spending review period, local government will have received a 55 per cent increase in resources. I also accept and recognise that local government has a proud record of finding efficiencies. We know, from past performance, that top-slicing a certain proportion of those savings is entirely appropriate.

Green Belt (St Andrews)

4. Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it supports the current green belt proposals for St Andrews. (S2O-7736)

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): Scottish Ministers approved the Fife structure plan in July 2002 with a modification that required the identification of a green belt around St Andrews and the boundaries to be defined in a local plan. Therefore, the exact definition of the green belt is a matter for Fife Council, as the planning authority.

Mr Brocklebank: Is the minister aware that the proposals for green belt that are outlined in Fife Council's current draft local plan fall far short of the green belt commitments that were outlined in the 2002 structure plan? Is he aware that, far from offering a belt to encircle the town, the redrawn proposals will encourage private development interests that could threaten the historic landscape setting of St Andrews? How might the situation be addressed by the Executive's new thinking on green belts generally?

Malcolm Chisholm: As I said in my answer, the precise details of the green belt are for Fife Council, although there will be a local inquiry and the reporter will, no doubt, have a view as well.

As Ted Brocklebank acknowledged, our role is to lay out the policy. An important Scottish planning policy was issued in the summer, which clarified the key objectives for green belts and acknowledged and emphasised the role that green belts can play in protecting and giving access to open space within and around towns and cities.

I will highlight two features of that. First, the policy advocates a fundamental review of existing green belts, to ensure that they can accommodate growth over a 20-year period. In other words, we want a long-term view to be taken. Secondly, and crucially—this relates to our wider proposals for planning modernisation—the policy places a stronger emphasis on the development plan than was the case previously. It stresses that the establishment and review of the green belt should be carried out by local authorities through the development plan process. We have various new proposals for public involvement in that, which will mean that, in future, the public will have a stronger input into decisions about green belts.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I thank the minister for his useful reply to Mr Brocklebank. Does he agree that it is important for Fife Council to engage in full consultation with the local community in St Andrews on the future of the green belt? Does he agree that the green belt is there not as a barrier to appropriate development, but to ensure that any development is appropriate?

Malcolm Chisholm: The word “appropriate” is fundamental here. The other issue that I emphasise is the need to take a long-term view. There has been a tendency for incremental encroachment on the green belt. We want planning to be long term, and the new Scottish planning policy emphasises that and ensures that that will be the case.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The minister spoke yesterday about the need to introduce a culture change in the planning system and to restore the faith of the general public in the structure planning process. Does he agree that the actions of Fife Council are undermining his planning reforms and that faith in the structure planning process? What action will he take against local authorities that break their development plans?

Malcolm Chisholm: We have a whole set of new proposals on development plans in our planning white paper. We consider development planning to be at the heart of the system. The new public engagement around that is a key feature of

our planning reforms. Our set of proposals will improve the existing situation. I cannot comment in detail on the proposals in Fife, particularly as they will be subject to a local inquiry. People will have a chance to express their views then.

Transport Funding

5. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has made sufficient budgetary provision to pay for the transport projects to which it is committed in principle and, if not, what discussions the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform has had with the Minister for Transport and Telecommunications in respect of which projects may not be supported. (S2O-7794)

The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon): The draft budget for 2006-07, which was published in September 2005, covers the period up to and including 2007-08. There is sufficient budgetary provision within those spending years to make a good start on the Executive’s ambitious programme of major transport infrastructure projects. Beyond 2007-08—on the assumption of at least a level budget in real terms—there is budgetary cover to proceed with all the planned transport projects.

Fergus Ewing: How can that be the case if we heard earlier today that the cost of the M74 project, which was estimated at £250 million four years ago, might now be double that; if we learned last week that the cost of the Edinburgh tramlines has risen, over a much shorter period, from £500 million to £714 million; and if the figures for the rail links from Glasgow and Edinburgh airports to the city centres have no proper estimates at this point? Does the minister agree that something has to give? Will the Executive hold a debate on the issue, given the substantial interest throughout Scotland in whether all the schemes will come to fruition?

George Lyon: For Mr Ewing’s information, I repeat that the Executive’s ambitious programme for major transport infrastructure has sufficient budgetary cover, as shown in the current budget documents. Beyond 2007-08, there is, as I have stated, an assumption of at least a level budget in real terms, and there is budgetary cover to proceed with all the planned transport projects.

Instead of worrying about the Executive’s budget, it would be helpful if Mr Ewing addressed the budget that the Scottish National Party might wish to present. The SNP has failed to produce one budget in the six years of the Parliament, and it failed to produce one for the general election, despite chalking up spending commitments of more than £10 billion through its wish list for airport and rail links. I can assure Mr Ewing that

we have the budgetary provision to cover our spending plans. It is time that he told us what his budgetary proposals are to cover his spending plans.

Communities Scotland (Regeneration)

6. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made by Communities Scotland in supporting designated regeneration areas. (S2O-7775)

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): Communities Scotland has been working with community planning partnerships, each of which has now developed a regeneration outcome agreement that will provide the basis for targeting the community regeneration fund and other resources. In the three years to 2008, the community regeneration fund will invest £318 million in deprived communities around Scotland.

Marilyn Livingstone: I welcome that funding. The regeneration in my constituency, which is important to us, is based around a village, so although housing is important, it is by no means the only issue for the regeneration team; there are many valuable and interesting projects. Will the minister reassure me that support will be forthcoming to ensure that the projects are sustainable?

Malcolm Chisholm: Obviously decisions about which projects will be supported are a matter for the community planning partnerships. I know that Fife will get more than £6 million for such projects in the spending period and that projects will focus on key matters such as employability, improving health and building stronger and safer communities. The precise spending priorities will very much be decided through the community planning arrangements, although obviously Johann Lamont and I take a great interest in the regeneration outcome agreements and ensure that they are effective in meeting the priorities that have been set. If Marilyn Livingstone has particular concerns about projects, I would be pleased to take them up.

Central Heating Initiative

7. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it has taken to evaluate the success of its central heating initiative. (S2O-7792)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): We are funding two major research projects to evaluate the impact of the central heating programme. The first is a long-term project that is being undertaken by the University of Edinburgh and TNS Social Research, which will examine the impact of the programme on the health of recipients. We expect that work to be

completed towards the end of 2006. The second is an annual survey of households that have been included in each of the first three years of the programme. That research has shown that, in the first year of the programme, almost nine tenths of the people surveyed who were in fuel poverty were lifted out of it after inclusion in the programme.

Karen Whitefield: Does the minister agree that greater flexibility needs to be built into the central heating programme and the warm deal, particularly for those who have partial central heating, such as an elderly constituent of mine who is in her 70s and has coal-fired heating that she can no longer use due to ill health? Does she also agree that flexibility for those under the age of 80 would greatly enhance the scheme and ensure that more older people in Scotland benefit from this important initiative?

Johann Lamont: Karen Whitefield will be aware that we are undertaking a review of the benefits of the central heating programme and the warm deal to examine how progress can be made. Final decisions have not yet been taken, so information from members throughout the chamber about the difficulties created by programmes with particular rules and regulations will be fed into the process.

I confirm that we propose to continue the programme at at least the same level as at present and will look to expand eligibility as far as possible within the available funding. I note Karen Whitefield's comments about flexibility and about partial and inefficient systems. As she knows, householders over 80 have benefited from such flexibility. We aim to expand the programme by offering upgrades and replacements of partial and inefficient systems for pensioners who are in receipt of pension credit.

We must always bear in mind the issue of fuel poverty, and we have asked the fuel poverty forum and others to advise us on the matter. Raising people out of fuel poverty must be central to the development of the programme in the future.

Affordable Housing (Shared Equity Schemes)

8. Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how its shared equity scheme will improve the availability of affordable housing across Scotland. (S2O-7745)

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): Within three years, we expect to fund 1,000 homestake houses a year across Scotland. That will make affordable housing available to many on low to modest incomes who aspire to home ownership. Homestake is a crucial part of our affordable housing investment programme, which will lead to the provision of more than 5,000 homes for low-cost home ownership and 16,500

homes for affordable rent over this and the next two years.

Nora Radcliffe: What, if any, consideration is being given to rural proofing the scheme and to the particular issues that may affect provision of affordable housing in the rural setting?

Malcolm Chisholm: Homestake will benefit rural areas to a considerable extent. I note that 10 per cent of the units that are currently planned are in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. That will complement the money that already goes to investment in rural housing—£97 million, which is a record figure, is the rural share of the housing investment programme for this year.

In general terms, the share of the investment that is going into rural areas is increasing. Homestake will be particularly attractive to those in rural areas; it will help first-time buyers and others.

Education and Young People, Tourism, Culture and Sport

Olympic Games 2012

1. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Executive what preparations it is making for the 2012 Olympic games. (S2O-7734)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): We will continue to work with all relevant parties to ensure that the many potential benefits of the Olympic games are delivered in Scotland. The London 2012 nations and regions group will be re-established and Scotland's interests will be represented by Julia Bracewell, chair of sportscotland, and David Williams, chief executive of EventScotland. In addition, Scotland's co-ordination group will be reformed. I will make an announcement on its composition soon.

Dennis Canavan: Will the minister repudiate the ill-informed comments of United Kingdom minister for sport, Richard Caborn, who announced recently that UK Sport will have

“sole responsibility for delivering of the Olympic medal success”?

One UK organisation will therefore be responsible for all UK athletes who have Olympic potential. Does the minister agree that Olympic success can best be achieved through a partnership in which the different nations of the UK are involved? Does she further agree that sportscotland and the Scottish Institute of Sport must be involved in the partnership and that they should therefore be allocated a fair share of resources so that Scottish athletes with Olympic potential can train in Scotland rather than have to move south of the border?

Patricia Ferguson: Our colleagues at Westminster will put in place whatever mechanisms they see fit for the athletes who will represent England and Wales. As far as our own athletes in Scotland are concerned, the arrangements that we have in place are that we will work through sportscotland and the Scottish Institute of Sport. Obviously, in terms of any additional help that can be given to us by UK Sport, we are happy to work in partnership on that.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister join me in congratulating the Scottish businesses that have already succeeded in entering the Olympic market, including the navyblue design group, which won the £500,000 tender to design the bid document and promotional literature, and Kirriemuir-based Hi-Fli Banners & Flags, which was involved in the production of the promotional and branding material for the bid? Will she provide assurances that the Executive will support Scottish businesses in strengthening the Scottish economy in the run-up to the 2012 Olympics?

Patricia Ferguson: Absolutely. As I think I have done before in the chamber, I congratulate the navyblue design group and Hi-Fli Banners & Flags on the work they have done in this regard. It is important to remember that it was not just winning those contracts that was important for those companies; the kudos and knock-on effect of their success won them other orders around the world.

We are very keen to work with all Scotland's businesses to make it possible for them to compete and to go for contracts that are related to the Olympic games in London. One of the purposes of Scotland's co-ordination group will be to make that process as simple as possible. We have discussed these matters with colleagues in Australia who were involved in the Sydney Olympics and we have learned some lessons from them. Obviously, we will put what we have learned into a Scottish context.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Has the minister considered discussing with the London 2012 nations and regions group how the procurement rules for companies can be designed to maximise the high environmental standards that many companies in Scotland offer—I am thinking in particular of Hi-Fli Banners & Flags, which the minister mentioned a moment ago—to ensure not only that the commercial opportunity the games offer is realised but that there is a lasting legacy of minimising damage to the environment?

Patricia Ferguson: Mr Swinney makes a good point: one of the very attractive aspects of Hi-Fli's success is exactly the point he makes. In a sense, the question works the other way round: a key requirement of bids was that all contracts should be as environmentally friendly as possible and of

an environmentally appropriate standard. That will continue to be the case as we move forward with the Olympic plans. It means that companies such as Hi-Fli Banners & Flags, which provides a unique service, will have a good opportunity to compete with others on a level playing field.

Gaelic

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The Presiding Officers have agreed that John Farquhar Munro's question will be in English and Gaelic. The supplementary to his question, however, will be in Gaelic only. Members who wish to hear an interpretation in English should ensure that the channel on their console is switched to channel 1. The volume should be set to a comfortable minimum to reduce any possibility of interference.

2. John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made by local authorities in respect of promoting the Gaelic language. (S2O-7750)

The member provided the following translation:

A dh'fhaighneachd den Riaghaltas dè an t-adhartas a tha air a dhèanamh le ùghdarrasan ionadail a thaobh brosnachadh na Gàidhlig.

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): Local authorities continue to make good progress. In particular, Highland Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar are implementing Gaelic language plans that set out how they will promote and enable the use of Gaelic in their areas.

John Farquhar Munro: Tha mi uabhasach pròiseil gu bheil am ministear air a bhith cho moiteil air Gàidhlig a chuideachadh thairis air na bliadhnaichean a chaidh seachad. Tha mi an dòchas gum bi e a' cumail a' dol a phutadh ùghdarrasan ionadail agus buidhnean poblach a dhèanamh cinnteach gu bheil na planaichean aca airson Gàidhlig air an stèidheachadh ann an ùine goirid agus gu bheil iad a' brosnachadh Gàidhlig agus a cultair ann an dòigh a tha freagarrach agus comasach airson an cànan a dhìon anns na bliadhnaichean a tha romhainn.

Following is a translation:

I am pleased that the minister has been so supportive of Gaelic over the years. Will he continue to press local authorities and public bodies to ensure that their plans are established soon and that they encourage Gaelic language and culture appropriately, to protect the language in the years ahead?

Peter Peacock: I am grateful to John Farquhar Munro for his question, but I am even more grateful for the interpretation. I assure him that we

will encourage local authorities and other public agencies to make rapid progress with their Gaelic language plans. We are at an exciting time in the life of Gaelic. The new powers that the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 gives us enable an acceleration of progress on the use of Gaelic. The act requires public agencies, local authorities and others to co-operate actively in that, and they will get our full encouragement to do so.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I hear the minister's answer about the promotion of Gaelic. Why did he rule out Welsh-style sabbatical courses for people to learn Gaelic and to improve the potential for people to teach Gaelic in our country? Since he ruled that out earlier this year, does he have any other bright ideas that might speed things up?

Peter Peacock: I seldom rule things out for ever. I have been given advice recently on how to encourage more people into Gaelic teaching, because it is a critical area in which we must make progress. We have made a huge amount of progress in Gaelic-medium education. It is one of the great success stories in education and in Gaelic in the past 15 years. I expect to publish a report in the near future that will argue for a range of new ways to encourage people into teaching. I rule nothing out if we are to make progress.

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): An aontaich am ministear gu bheil an cùrsa airson luchd-teagaisg a thrèanadh a tha Oilthigh Shrath Chluaidh a' tairgsinn tro Colaiste a' Chaisteil ann an Leòdhas a' dèanamh feum dha-riribh? An dèan am ministear a dhìcheall a dhèanamh cinnteach gun obraich a h-uile colaiste ann an Oilthigh na Gàidealtachd is nan Eilean—gu h-àraid Sabhal Mòr Ostaig—le Colaiste a' Chaisteil airson barrachd luchd-teagaisg a thrèanadh agus an ullachadh airson a dhol a theagasg?

Following is a translation:

Does the minister agree that the University of Strathclyde's teacher training course, which is offered through Lews Castle College, has been very useful? Will he make every effort to ensure that all colleges in the university of the Highlands and Islands—particularly Sabhal Mòr Ostaig—work with Lews Castle College to train more teachers?

Peter Peacock: Alasdair Morrison is right to say that the Strathclyde course that is being delivered through Lews Castle College is making an important contribution to the development of Gaelic generally, but particularly in relation to teaching. I share his aspiration that more colleges should participate in delivering that course. I have a particular aspiration, as does Alasdair Morrison, to see Sabhal Mòr Ostaig being more centrally involved in future.

Olympic Games 2012

3. Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it supports calls for Scotland to have its own Olympic team at the 2012 games in London. (S2O-7782)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): No. The International Olympic Committee decides on which Olympic committees it will recognise. There are significant benefits for Scottish athletes with the talent to reach the Great Britain squad. The Scottish Executive has no plans to explore the possibility of Scotland fielding its own team in the Olympics.

Michael McMahon: I ask the minister to ignore the petty nationalism that we heard during this morning's debate and to address some of the points that the SNP's spokespeople made. They want us to join countries such as Ireland and New Zealand in sending teams of around 50 to 150 athletes to the Olympic games. Does she agree that, rather than doing that, we should stick with the British system that allowed 24 Scots to go to the Athens Olympics and win four medals, while Ireland won only one medal and the might of New Zealand, which had a squad of 150, returned with none at all?

Patricia Ferguson: I am always happy to at least try to ignore petty nationalism but, unfortunately, it is sometimes a bit too in your face to be ignored.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Surely not.

Patricia Ferguson: Mr Swinney feigns surprise, but I am sure that it is only a feint.

Michael McMahon is correct to point out the disparities. The point is that athletes must be able to compete against their peers at a particular level, regardless of what country they come from. Our athletes make a significant contribution to the GB team and are happy to be considered in that way. As I pointed out this morning, a number of our athletes succeed in winning medals at various levels in the Olympics precisely because they are part of a team made up of others from the home nations. If we were to adopt the nationalists' idea, we would deprive people such as Shirley Robertson of the opportunity to win a gold medal. I do not think that any member would be in favour of that.

Alternative Educational Opportunities

4. Kate Maclean (Dundee West) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what alternative educational opportunities, such as vocational skills, are being offered to non-academic schoolchildren. (S2O-7776)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): Our reform programme is designed to increase choice and opportunity for all our pupils, whatever their abilities or potential. It includes the aim of widening vocational options considerably.

Kate Maclean: Is the minister aware that Dundee City Council's pre-apprenticeship programme was singled out as an example of good practice by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in a recent report? Will he join me in congratulating Dundee City Council, Dundee College and the local schools and employers that have contributed to that success? Given that the number of applicants to the programme exceeded the number of places available, will the minister consider providing more resources to extend the programme so that more Dundee pupils can benefit? Will he also consider rolling out the programme elsewhere in Scotland?

Peter Peacock: I am happy to join Kate Maclean in congratulating Dundee City Council and all the partners she mentioned on the success of the pre-apprenticeship programme, which is helping young people to get experience in fields such as building work, care, cookery, motor vehicle maintenance and engineering. In particular, HMIE congratulated Dundee City Council on how it selected young people to go to vocational training, which was regarded to be a weakness in the rest of the education system. It identified that, by doing that correctly, Dundee was maintaining the stay-on rate of young people in those courses. We want to see more of that happening throughout Scotland. Rather than just offering academic routes to young people, we want to widen opportunities by providing them with an equally valid vocational option.

In relation to additional funding, following the school-college review that the Executive has undertaken over the past few years, we announced in the earlier part of this year that we have provided our colleges with more than £40 million-worth of additional resources to work more effectively with schools to do exactly the kinds of things that are being done in Dundee. I hope that not just Dundee, but other parts of Scotland, will benefit from that.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): The minister will be aware that the HMIE report that was published last week found that poor procedures for selecting school pupils for college-based vocational programmes have led to high drop-out rates from those programmes. Does he agree that those findings give cause for concern? What action will he take to promote more effective use of vocational options and genuine parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications?

Peter Peacock: I covered some of those points in my answer to Kate Maclean's supplementary question. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton is correct to point out that the inspectors' report was critical of a number of aspects of past performance in education. We should remember that the report was retrospective rather than about the current prospect. That said, all the work that we did through the school-college review has taken care, or is taking care, of the points of criticism the inspectors raised—for example, selection.

The report is about strengthening partnership between colleges and local schools. A huge amount of work is being done on that and more resources are being deployed to allow it to happen. We expect all the points of action to be overtaken as a consequence. We genuinely want to see much greater parity of esteem between vocational and academic learning and we want to make it clear that people can move between those modes of learning at different stages of their school career to give them the skills and the rounded education that they require to be successful into the future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

VisitScotland (City of Edinburgh)

6. Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how many staff employed by VisitScotland are solely dedicated to promoting the city of Edinburgh. (S2O-7795)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): VisitScotland employs 68 members of staff to market Edinburgh as a world-class tourist destination and to deal with visitor bookings and inquiries. A further 12 VisitScotland staff are in support roles and an additional 12 people work in the Edinburgh convention bureau, which is the joint venture between VisitScotland and the City of Edinburgh Council that promotes business tourism in the city.

Mr MacAskill: Edinburgh's competition is global, not local, and international destinations, not Scottish resorts, are the threat. Further, it is ingenious of the minister to refer to the convention centre, which is a separate matter. Amsterdam, which is a major competitor, employs 138 dedicated staff for the Amsterdam area tourist board. How can Edinburgh possibly compete if it is not adequately resourced?

Patricia Ferguson: If we look at outcomes rather than inputs in this debate, we will get the answer. Recent figures for the first eight months of the year show that accommodation occupancy levels in hotels and self-catering establishments in Edinburgh are up compared with the same period last year. All our indicators point to the fact that

tourism in Edinburgh is booming. Further, last year, the Edinburgh and Lothians Tourist Board, in its previous guise, spent some £300,000 promoting Edinburgh. That figure increased this year to £2 million. Kenny MacAskill and I share an ambition for Edinburgh, but I also have an ambition for the rest of Scotland. The comparisons that he makes do not do Edinburgh's case much good.

Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (Implementation)

7. Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it will take in advance of the implementation on 14 November 2005 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 to resolve any potential funding disputes between local authorities. (S2O-7781)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Robert Brown): Scottish Executive officials are due to meet officials from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on 10 October 2005 to discuss a range of options for resolving potential disputes between local authorities.

Mr Macintosh: I am pleased to hear that. Does the minister agree that, under the 2004 act, we are trying to reduce confrontation between families and local authorities over the additional support that is available to pupils? Does he support Glasgow City Council's publicly stated plans to withdraw, from 14 November, hundreds of thousands of pounds of funding from young people with additional support who live in Glasgow but attend schools in East Renfrewshire, East Dunbartonshire and elsewhere? Does he believe that such a move will benefit families whose children require additional support? Does he think that that is fair?

Robert Brown: Ken Macintosh will be aware that, under section 23(3) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, ministers can determine the costs that an authority that provides education to a child who lives in another authority's area can recover from that home authority if the two authorities cannot reach agreement on the costs. It is rarely necessary to bring that provision into effect; it happened most recently in 1997. However, East Renfrewshire has referred for decision by ministers the dispute with Glasgow to which Mr Macintosh referred. Ministers will decide on that in the near future. In those circumstances, it would be inappropriate for ministers to comment on the precise nature of the dispute between the two authorities.

Business Rates

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a statement by Tom McCabe on business rates. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement. There should therefore be no interventions.

14:54

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): Last month, the First Minister announced in his statement on the legislative programme the Executive's intention to cut Scotland's business rate poundage and in so doing to reinforce a competitive platform for Scottish business. He also pledged to consider carefully a specific reduction in business rates for research and development-intensive companies, because we are determined to build on that platform. Today, I will set out to the Parliament a timeline that will enable us to secure that competitive advantage and I will explain how we intend to take our plans forward.

Both those developments will contribute to the number 1 priority of Scotland's devolved Government—growing our economy. Our commitment to building a strong and ambitious Scotland is absolute. A successful Scottish economy is a vital prerequisite for first-class public services and for building a Scotland in which opportunity exists for all. Sustained and sustainable economic growth is about more than just statistical indicators; it is about people, their hopes and their aspirations.

Growth brings jobs and jobs are an important element in ensuring stable and prosperous communities. Growth brings fulfilment to individuals—to employees and employers, to investors and to people in local communities—and it gives confidence to the business community, inspiring companies to meet their full potential and providing a platform for long-term sustainability.

The key to achieving economic growth is, of course, successful businesses. They are the main drivers of economic growth. Strong, profitable, growing businesses are fundamental to Scotland's future success. The role of Government is to help to create the right conditions for a vibrant and growing economy. We want an environment where businesses, from the single trader to the successful Scottish companies that operate around the world, can grow and prosper; we want an environment that rewards people for being enterprising, for taking risks, for developing their staff and for contributing to Scotland's growth.

However, we also want an environment that says to the business community, as it says to the

ordinary citizen, "You have a right to certain conditions, but with them come responsibilities." Scotland's business community has a responsibility to stand up to that challenge, to demonstrate the entrepreneurial dynamism that the competitive advantage assists and to speed up our rate of growth and create economic opportunity for more of Scotland's people.

For our part, the Executive is determined to secure that competitive advantage for Scotland and to provide further incentives to improve business competitiveness. An important part of that will be to demonstrate that, wherever possible, we take account of business opinion. Businesses have told us that the existing poundage rate places them at a competitive disadvantage. The First Minister's announcement not only eliminates any suggestion of such a disadvantage, but reaffirms our position of competitive strength compared with south of the border.

In his statement on 6 September, the First Minister indicated that, from 1 April 2007, we will align the poundage rate in Scotland fully with that in England. Today, I can announce that businesses will benefit sooner and that from 1 April 2006 we will invest £100 million in Scotland's economy and reduce the existing gap by half.

The 2005 revaluation showed that, on average, rateable values in Scotland had increased by 13.3 per cent, compared with 17.7 per cent in England. As a result of our policy of limiting increases to inflation or below, the rates burden on Scottish businesses, relative to England, has been falling over the past five years. Taking those factors together with the new lower poundage rate means that businesses in Scotland will now have significantly reduced operating costs. That will give them that all-important competitive edge. My enterprise colleagues and I will continue to stress to the business community that we will look to them to take full advantage of that opportunity for the benefit of Scotland and the people of Scotland.

Removing the poundage gap with England will mean that organisations in Scotland will have an additional £100 million to invest in 2006-07, rising to an estimated £180 million in 2007-08. Those are significant sums, which we will find from within the Executive's overall budget. They are also the amounts by which the business rate income collected by local authorities will be reduced. We will ensure that the change is cost neutral to Scotland's local authorities. We will do all that by using the space created by prudent management to release resources within the Executive's overall budget.

In summary, we will move progressively through 2006, providing maximum benefit to businesses from 1 April 2007. We will announce the actual

Scottish poundage rate for 2006-07 later this year, in line with the usual timetable, when we lodge the annual order.

That brings me to our plans to give Scotland a further competitive advantage by reducing business rates even further for research and development-intensive companies. An increase in Scotland's rate of investment in research and development is crucial if we are to continue to develop as a modern, dynamic and knowledge-based economy.

International studies confirm a positive correlation between investment in research and development and higher economic growth, which is why, at the outset of this session of Parliament, we committed to work with businesses to increase their investment in research and development to match more closely our competitor countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Our best advisers in that endeavour will be the business community. Therefore, the next stage will be to consult on draft proposals. I intend to issue a consultation document containing the proposals before the end of this calendar year and to announce our conclusions by summer 2006.

The measures that I have set out today will give all businesses in Scotland the opportunity to share in our ambitions for Scotland. They will allow businesses to undertake greater investment, recruitment and research and to make an increasing contribution to the growth of Scotland's economy. We are determined to deliver for Scotland the right conditions for dynamic and innovative enterprises to grow and prosper. We want to build on our record levels of employment, which are sustaining a thriving economy and underpinning a productive public sector. In short, we want to see business grow.

That growth will clearly depend on a lot more than business rates. For example, it will depend on the skills of our workforce and its adaptability in an ever-changing environment. That is why Government and business must continue to work together to move Scotland further towards a culture of continuous improvement that generates innovative and dynamic solutions in a competitive world. The Executive is doing its part and we expect businesses throughout Scotland to grasp the opportunity to increase their capacity and to invest in Scotland's future economic prosperity.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The minister will now take questions on the issues that are raised in his statement, for which I will allow about 20 minutes.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I thank the minister for providing me with an advance copy of his statement. I welcome the U-

turn that he has announced and thank him as generously and as graciously as possible for accepting a long-standing Scottish National Party policy—there are plenty more that he could accept if he wanted to.

The First Minister in his statement of 6 September made absolutely no reference to the introduction of the measure on 1 April 2007, so any attempt to say that he did is just spin. Now that the minister has announced the U-turn, does he accept that, since 2000, the Scottish Executive has removed more than £800 million from Scottish businesses as a result of higher business rates, which has put those businesses at a competitive disadvantage? The minister said that he wants to create a level playing field, so why does he intend to continue to put Scottish business at a competitive disadvantage by staggering the introduction of the policy over two years? Why is the minister prolonging the agony for Scottish business? Why does he not accept that his Government has been wrong for the past five years and that he should now get on with making good one of the mistakes for which he, the previous Minister for Finance and Public Services and the First Minister have all been responsible?

Mr McCabe: I would like to say that that was a gracious response, but that would be stretching credibility. I inquire whether the SNP policy to which Mr Swinney referred was today's, last week's or the one to which the SNP will change tomorrow. Has the SNP announced a spending commitment today, will it do that next week or will it ever cost a spending commitment at any time in the lifetime of the Parliament?

We can afford the measure because we have taken a prudent approach to the finances of Scotland's Government and because we have generated a partnership with business in Scotland, which is reflected in the investments to which the First Minister referred during First Minister's question time. That partnership is successful because we have invested in the measures that Scottish businesses have told us are important. That is why we are investing to produce not a level playing field but a serious competitive advantage for businesses here in Scotland. That is why we are investing in infrastructure such as the M74—the kind of infrastructure that Mr Ewing was complaining about so loudly only a few moments ago. That is exactly the kind of thing that Scottish businesses have asked for, that the Executive has delivered and that we will continue to deliver as we produce the dynamic, innovative economy that will produce opportunity for this and future generations in the new, modern Scotland.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the minister for his statement and for the advance copy of it. In light of the figures that we

heard earlier showing the decline in Scottish manufacturing exports, the cut surely cannot come soon enough. Over the past five years, Scottish businesses have paid an extra £838 million in rates as a direct result of a decision taken by the minister's predecessor. Every year that goes by, an additional £180 million is paid. Now that the Executive has accepted the principle that rates should be cut, why should businesses have to wait before the full reduction comes through? Does the Executive now accept that it was wrong to increase rates in Scotland six years ago or are all its critics in the business community simply to be dismissed as idiots?

Mr McCabe: I am happy to say that what Scottish businesses have enjoyed over the past five years is a thriving economy produced by a Westminster Government that has taken hold of the macroeconomic indicators in this country, transformed our fortunes and made us the envy of our partners in Europe. All that economic success and the thriving economy that still exists in Scotland and the rest of Great Britain have been and continue to be enjoyed by the business community in Scotland. We believe that our investment decisions over the past five years were appropriate at the time that they were made and compensated for the dire neglect that we experienced over the Conservative years. Our investment decisions were introduced in a climate of prudence and stability, not in a climate of a United Kingdom chancellor dancing in and out of the Treasury announcing every couple of minutes another hike in interest rates as he tried to rescue a British economy that was falling into tatters.

Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I am sure that the minister would like to thank the Liberal Democrats for bringing business rates to the top of the agenda. Will he clarify whether the proposals for further help for research and development-intensive companies will be over and above the two-step move to bring Scotland's poundage rate into line with that of England? If so, does he have an estimate of how much money is available or might be required?

Mr McCabe: There are a number of aspects to that question. I am always delighted to congratulate my Liberal Democrat colleagues. They regularly show unique foresight in the Parliament, as I am sure they will continue to do.

Our research and development initiative will be over and above the closure of the poundage rate gap. I would not want to prejudge the eventual cost. I want to begin a consultation, listen to what members of the business community who are involved in research and development have to say and take the best possible decisions relative to the advice that the business community offers at that time.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): In the spirit of partnership, perhaps I should say that I, too, was always in favour of the cut. I welcome the statement, which shows that the Executive has listened to business. Will the minister give me further detail on how the Executive will work with businesses and their representative bodies to ensure that the business rate reduction will result in an increase in competitiveness?

Mr McCabe: I am pleased to give some indication of our continuing and developing relationship with the business community. Of course, I acknowledge that Christine May always supported the initiative. In the previous roles that she has played in public life, she has been recognised as someone who is forward thinking and open to new ideas and I can fully understand why she has always supported the proposal.

We have an on-going dialogue with the business community. Yesterday, I met representatives of the Scottish Council for Development and Industry and the various component bodies that make up the council. We had an interesting conversation about the implications of the changes that I am confirming this afternoon. I was pleased to hear representatives of the SCDI congratulating the Executive on the move and saying that they feel comfortable with our various initiatives to assist the Scottish economy.

We will do all that we can to ensure that that kind of dialogue continues and that that comfort level not only continues but increases. We recognise the value of the contribution that the business community makes to our economy. As I said in my statement, it is the job of Government to create the right conditions and it is the job of business to capitalise on those conditions. Working together, we will ensure that that happens.

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): I thank the minister for giving advance sight of the statement. How did the Scottish Executive assess the benefit of an across-the-board reduction in business rates, which is an indiscriminating, blunt economic instrument, against spending £180 million of new money directly to support research and development in Scotland, new sustainable businesses, such as renewable energy companies, or businesses and social enterprises that promote economic regeneration in deprived areas of Scotland? On what basis was a cut in business rates the priority choice for supporting enterprise in Scotland?

Mr McCabe: I will answer some of those points but first—if you will indulge me for a moment, Presiding Officer—I should state that we decided to go ahead with the measure by not listening to a word that is uttered by the Green party or to the economic policies that its members put forward in

the Parliament. If we paid any attention to the nonsense that they utter, our economy would be in tatters and our people would be in despair. It is a cheek for a representative of the Green party to talk about economic regeneration when that party has opposed the M74 completion time and again. The people in the east end of Glasgow who will get relief from the environmental conditions that are detrimental to their health and who will benefit from the economic opportunities associated with that road listen to the utterances of Mr Ballard and his colleagues and wonder whether they are on the same planet.

We intend to continue with our investments in our environment. We will continue to pursue our challenging environmental targets for renewable energy and ensure that they are met. In doing so, we will give another kind of competitive advantage to the Scottish economy, because our investment in renewable technologies and that kind of activity will ensure that, as the emerging economies of the world start to take a greater interest in those technologies, our companies that are involved in renewable energy and environmental technology will be able to sell their knowledge and expertise around the world, just as our companies that are involved in the oil industry do at the moment.

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): For two and a half years, the Executive has been telling me that there is no money to pay for the proposals under our bill for free school meals, which would cost £174 million. However, it turns out that the Executive has the money, but has chosen to give it to businesses as a nice little earner. What could be more important than the health of the children and young people in Scotland? I ask the minister to reconsider his decision and to fund our proposals to provide free, healthy school meals for all our children.

Mr McCabe: The Executive has been saying for the past two and a half years not that we do not have the money for that bill, but that we do not agree with that bill and have no intention of pushing resources, through free school meals, to individuals who can well afford to pay for their children's meals and are prepared to do so. We have said that we will target resources to those who need them most, including some of our most challenged communities and schools. In that way, we will ensure that the children in those communities and schools have an opportunity to participate in the vibrancy and success of Scotland's economy so that, in future, they are not excluded from that success and have the opportunities that have been denied to them for too long. We will achieve that not by directing resources to people who can already afford to pay, but by targeting resources appropriately. That is what we intend to do now and in the future.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The minister will be aware of our concern about the savings from the efficient government initiative, given the absence of specific outcome objectives and the lack of statistical data to prove those outcomes. If he is serious about improving competitive advantage and wishes to pass muster with business in Scotland and Scottish taxpayers, I suggest that he gives clear-cut objectives on competitiveness. We know that we are 35th in the IMD world competitiveness league, compared with the UK's 22nd. We are at half the UK level on R and D; on growth, there is a perpetual gap. Will he state clear objectives and commit to publish the outcomes on a regular basis so that we can see whether Scotland converges with the UK on competitiveness?

Mr McCabe: I am afraid that I do not agree with the assertion that was made at the start of that question and I think that that makes the rest of it irrelevant.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I note that the minister made no mention of small business rates relief schemes. Will he share his thoughts on that with us? Will he guarantee that he will no longer pursue the idea that rates relief schemes for small businesses should be paid for by larger ones?

Mr McCabe: We have discussed the principle of rates relief schemes. It would be an exaggeration to say that businesses in Scotland are happy about the way in which such schemes are funded, but they recognise some equity and fairness in the current system, which we do not intend to alter. When I met representatives of the business community yesterday, I was asked whether we intended to phase out small business rates relief schemes. I told them that no such consideration had been made. That remains our position. There is some justification for the current method of funding those schemes.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): The minister will be aware that the area that I represent has faced major economic challenges in recent years. In spite of that, it has the highest rate of economic activity in Scotland, much of which is driven by new business start-ups and the growth of indigenous businesses. How will the cut in Scotland's business rate poundage aid the growth of indigenous businesses throughout the rest of Scotland and encourage new business start-ups? What measures will the minister use to prove the success of the initiative?

Mr McCabe: As I said in my statement, we look to the business community to stand up to the challenge and our dialogue with the business community continues. I know that business is committed to doing all that it can to demonstrate the benefits of the initiative to the Scottish

economy. It is in its interests to do so and it is in our interests to pursue that confirmation. We will continue to do that. I was pleased to hear Bristow Muldoon speak about the economic success that is enjoyed in his area and I assure him that the Executive will continue to pursue the initiative and the investments—including investments in infrastructure—that will ensure that those successes are maintained and improved in future years.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): The minister will be aware that the higher tax in Scotland has been known as Jack's tax, after its author, who introduced it seven years ago as his second major ministerial act—his first act, obviously, was to ignore the Holyrood costs. I ask the minister whether this is a case of Jack's tax—rest in peace. Is there any example of a longer period elapsing between the death notice, which was issued last month, and the funeral ceremony, which is not scheduled to take place until 1 April 2007? More seriously, why should the Executive claim any credit whatever, given that we have had higher tax in our country in every month since the Executive gained the power to set the tax and that we will have a level playing field for only the final month of the first eight years of the Scottish Parliament?

Mr McCabe: Dear, dear—I am almost depressed. That was a particularly morbid contribution from Mr Ewing. Given his demeanour, perhaps he should consider a career change; he might make a good undertaker.

It is not a question of Jack's tax. If people looked at the matter in the correct way, we could talk about Jack's record investments in public services, Jack's record investments in infrastructure, Jack's record investments in health and Jack's record investments in education. That is how we should consider the matter. The resources that are available to the public sector and the volume of services that are delivered to people have increased substantially. That is how we should consider our thriving economy. We are determined to build on that.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): We have heard a lot of empty talk and meaningless statistics from the SNP about competitiveness. Does the minister agree that Labour's continuing economic and political success allows him to deliver a competitive advantage to Scottish businesses? Does he agree that it is up to business to reciprocate positively and to take on board its responsibility to deliver a successful growth pattern?

Mr McCabe: As I have said several times, I concur absolutely that business has an obligation to respond positively to the change. It must show

that the extra investment that is available to it produces a benefit for the Scottish economy.

We have heard much empty rhetoric from the SNP. It might be thought that referring to the events of last Thursday would concentrate SNP members' minds. Perhaps the positive legislative statement and the positive announcements on giving Scottish business a competitive advantage had a small part to play in the wonderful victory in Cathcart last week.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Seventy per cent did not vote.

Mr McCabe: One would think that Mr Sheridan would have the humility to be quiet, given that his party was decimated last Thursday.

Tommy Sheridan: Is the minister proud that 70 per cent did not vote? That is a disgrace.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mr McCabe: Mr Sheridan does not recognise the judgment of the people of Cathcart that he is totally and utterly irrelevant in the politics of Scotland.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I apologise for arriving late but, having read the statement, I am sure that my technical question will still be admissible—although, having heard the minister's performance just now, I am not sure that I wish to ask a question of him in such form.

The reduction in the business rate poundage has been costed at £180 million. Does the minister agree that, as the Executive transfers funds to local authorities to pay the non-domestic rates bills of schools and other public bodies, the cost is far lower than £180 million and therefore a level playing field could be achieved far sooner?

Mr McCabe: I disagree. I acknowledge that Mr Monteith came late to the debate. He comes late to many things. In fact, he has not even arrived yet at the conclusion that the policies in which he believes have destroyed his party, made it irrelevant in Scotland and blown it apart throughout the United Kingdom. Eventually, that simple fact may dawn on him, but all the evidence is that he is still pretty far away from that. We have costed the proposal properly. I said in my statement that the change will be cost neutral to local authorities and that remains the case.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): The minister is right to set great store by the strong partnership that is developing between the Government and business. Will he say a little about how that partnership will meet targets for closing skills gaps, which he said in his statement was important for economic growth?

Mr McCabe: That is a central plank of the work that my colleague the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning pursues. He recognises fully that closing skills gaps is a critical component of closing the opportunity gap for people in Scotland. That is central to our approach. I said that we want to draw as many people as possible into economic opportunity. We want to bring as many people as possible into the labour market and allow them to thrive and to make their own economic choices in life. I know that Nicol Stephen is absolutely committed to that and to improving the skills and the educational stock of goods in our society. We will continue to pursue and monitor that. The member is right to identify it as a critical component of the debate.

St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-3356, in the name of Dennis Canavan, on the general principles of the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill.

15:25

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): I thank the non-Executive bills unit, as well as all those who were involved in producing the stage 1 report on the bill, especially members and clerks of the Finance Committee and the Enterprise and Culture Committee, witnesses and respondents to the consultation.

The purpose of the bill is to facilitate the establishment of a national holiday on or around St Andrew's day in order to recognise our patron saint and to give the people of Scotland the opportunity to celebrate our national identity and our ethnic and cultural diversity. Scotland is one of the few countries in the world that does not have a national day holiday. We are also right at the bottom of the European league for the number of public holidays.

The bill has received widespread support in Parliament and around the country. The proposal to introduce the bill was supported by 75 MSPs from all parties and none, which at that stage was a record level of support for any proposed member's bill. Many other expressions of support have been received from various sources, including the trade union movement, local authorities, the Commission for Racial Equality and all the major churches and other faith groups. A recent MORI opinion poll indicates that 75 per cent of Scots are in favour of the proposal. Moreover, 85 per cent of respondents to my consultation and 81 per cent of respondents to the lead committee's consultation are in favour.

However, it is obvious that the Scottish Executive has reservations. Its amendment states that the bill

"would not place a statutory obligation on employers to grant St Andrew's Day as part of employee holiday entitlement".

That is not entirely accurate. The bill would give a St Andrew's day bank holiday exactly the same statutory recognition as any other bank holiday. If any group of workers have all bank holidays written into their contractual holiday entitlement, their employer would have a statutory obligation to grant a St Andrew's day holiday. Apparently, the Executive fails to understand that workers are not

guaranteed a holiday on any bank holiday, unless that is written into their contract of employment.

The Parliament does not have the power to close down every workplace on a particular day. Would we want to have such a power? Hospitals and emergency services must remain open at all times. However, the legislation on bank holidays is the only instrument that is available to the Parliament to create anything like a nationwide holiday. Many employers, in both the private sector and the public sector, recognise bank holidays, and many trade unions have negotiated recognition of bank holidays into workers' contracts. It is absolutely spurious to argue that if it is not to be a holiday for everyone, it cannot be a holiday for anyone.

The Executive amendment concedes

"that St Andrew's Day should be a day of national celebration"

and asks the Parliament to support

"the Scottish Executive's commitment to achieving this objective".

In a letter to the lead committee, Tom McCabe claimed that

"there are more effective ways of encouraging Scots to celebrate our national day",

but he failed to give any examples of those more effective ways. How on earth could a working day be a more effective celebration than a holiday? John Knox must be birling in his grave at such a perverse interpretation of the work ethic. Let us celebrate St Andrew's day by telling the workers to get on with their work.

The Executive is concerned about the effect on business, but there are some in the business community who strongly support my bill, including the Scottish Retail Consortium, the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions and leading business people such as Lord Macfarlane of Bearsden. Although the Confederation of British Industry, the bankers and the Federation of Small Businesses expressed reservations, even they indicated that they would be prepared to go along with the proposal provided that the St Andrew's day holiday was a replacement for an existing holiday rather than an additional holiday.

Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD): Does Dennis Canavan think that the Scottish Retail Consortium has taken the view, on balance, that of the 75 per cent who support the holiday more will go Christmas shopping than will celebrate St Andrew?

Dennis Canavan: I see nothing wrong, in principle, with people going shopping on a bank holiday. That has been an established custom for

many years, so I do not take Jim Wallace's point at all.

My intention is that the St Andrew's day holiday should be an additional holiday, but the bill as drafted is flexible enough to accommodate either option, and that would be a matter for negotiation between employers and employees.

It is worth pointing out that one part of the United Kingdom already has not just one but two additional bank holidays. In Northern Ireland, 12 July is a bank holiday, as is 17 March, St Patrick's day, which is also a bank holiday in the Republic of Ireland. Surely it would be preposterous to argue that St Patrick's day is somehow bad for Irish business and bad for the Irish economy when it gives an injection of €80 million to the Dublin economy alone, as well as promoting Ireland internationally. Similarly, a St Andrew's day bank holiday should be seen not as a threat but as a business opportunity, especially in sectors such as retail, tourism, leisure, culture and the hospitality industries. A St Andrew's day bank holiday would be good for Scottish business, good for the Scottish economy and good for the promotion of Scotland internationally.

I remind the Parliament that the public consultation on the bill began 15 months ago. The bill was published five months ago and has been considered in detail by the Enterprise and Culture Committee. Why, then, is the Executive asking the Parliament to refer the matter back to the committee for further consideration? That looks like a devious ploy to kick the ball into the long grass. Why refer a bill back to a committee that has already considered it and reached the unanimous conclusion that the Parliament should approve its general principles? Any additional points of detail could surely be dealt with by the committee at stage 2, but now is the time to decide on the general principles. This is an historic opportunity for the Parliament to show a lead to the nation by giving statutory recognition to St Andrew's day. By doing so, we will encourage the people of Scotland to celebrate our national identity and to promote Scotland on the international stage.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill.

15:33

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): The introduction of the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill to Parliament has undoubtedly brought to the fore discussion about our national day and focused minds on how we ought to celebrate that day. I know that Dennis Canavan has a long-standing

interest in the subject and I offer my congratulations on the work that he has done so far. We may not agree on how today's proceedings should conclude, but I want to make it clear on behalf of the Executive that we respect his intentions.

I recognise the work that has been done by the Enterprise and Culture Committee. The committee was given what, at first sight, looked like a straightforward task, but its examination of the issues has revealed their complexities, as well as the fact that the bill would not produce its intended effect. Our amendment mentions two important principles to which we think everyone in the Parliament would adhere: that we should legislate only when it is necessary to do so and that, when we legislate, we should be able to give practical effect to that legislation. The Executive is committed to improving the way in which our national day is celebrated, but we agree with the committee's conclusion that the bill does not satisfy those two important criteria. The bill's only direct legal effect would be to suspend financial and other dealings on St Andrew's day, which would in effect allow banks to close and remove the possibility of penalties for the delayed payments that would be caused by that closure.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Does the minister agree that the second of his legislative criteria would indeed be met if the bill focused attention on St Andrew's day and on the identity and promotion of Scotland?

Mr McCabe: The Executive's point is that we do not need to legislate to focus on such things. The Executive and people throughout Scotland are interested in achieving that objective, but it is not necessary to pass legislation to do so.

The bill would not create a mandatory public holiday in Scotland, as there is no such legal concept. Therefore, we could not enforce the bill as it stands even if we passed it. We believe that without legislation—I stress that—there is ample flexibility in the current allocation of holidays to allow localities or organisations to move holidays from their existing time to St Andrew's day if they wish to do so.

There is no doubt that broad consensus exists over the desirability of improving the way in which we celebrate St Andrew's day. The member in charge of the bill, a wide cross-section of members and Scottish society want to see such an improvement; so does the Executive, which is eager to build on the initiatives that it has already introduced to ensure that that aspiration is given practical effect. Referring the bill back to the committee will keep it alive and will keep alive the search for a more comprehensive way of celebrating our national day.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the minister give members one concrete example of a way in which St Andrew's day can be better celebrated than by having a public holiday?

Mr McCabe: Yes. We could celebrate it by celebrating our culture and creating a number of events throughout Scotland.

Bruce Crawford: We are doing that anyway.

Mr McCabe: Excuse me. The member asked a question and should have the courtesy to listen to the answer.

We could celebrate St Andrew's day better by ensuring that on that day we promote our country, its interests, history and traditions abroad better than we currently do.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the minister take an intervention?

Mr McCabe: No, I am sorry. I am winding up.

For the reasons that I have outlined, we suggest in our amendment that the bill should be referred back to the committee and that it should actively consider a range of options for substantially improving and embedding the way in which we celebrate and recognise our national day. We commend that course of action to the Parliament.

I move amendment S2M-3356.2, to leave out from "agrees" to end and insert:

"notes that the Enterprise and Culture Committee supports the principles of the Bill; believes that St Andrew's Day should be a day of national celebration and strongly supports the Scottish Executive's commitment to achieving this objective; notes that the Enterprise and Culture Committee's Stage 1 report concludes that the Bill does not fulfil this purpose and would not place a statutory obligation on employers to grant St Andrew's Day as part of employee holiday entitlement; seeks to uphold the consensus across the Parliament that we should only legislate where necessary and when we can give effect to that legislation; believes that there is further work to be done to develop proposals to celebrate St Andrew's Day; agrees to refer the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill back to the Enterprise and Culture Committee for a further report on the general principles, and considers that further proposals should be developed for the celebration of St Andrew's Day."

15:38

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): That was a pretty poor apology by the minister for the Executive's stance.

I commend Dennis Canavan for the way in which he has pursued the issue and for introducing his member's bill. Whatever one's view on the details of the bill, it must be acknowledged that Dennis Canavan has done a tremendous amount of work in consulting interested parties and in rallying support for his proposal. The

Scottish Conservatives support the bill's general principles, with one important caveat, which is covered by my amendment. I will come to that caveat shortly.

St Andrew was the Lord's first apostle. He was a fisherman in Galilee who was executed by the Romans. His bones were buried but removed 300 years later to Constantinople in Turkey by Emperor Constantine. Legend has it that a Greek monk called St Rule—or St Regulus—was warned in a dream that St Andrew's remains were to be removed and that he was directed by an angel to take the remains that he could find to the ends of the earth for safekeeping. St Rule followed those directions and took a tooth, an arm, a knee-cap and some fingers from the tomb as far away as he could.

At that time, Scotland was at the edge of the known world. St Rule was shipwrecked in Scotland with his cargo and the town of St Andrews—which is, of course, the home of my colleague Mr Brocklebank—was founded. St Andrew is now our patron saint, of course, and his name is celebrated on 30 November by Scots around the world.

Dennis Canavan's intention in introducing the bill was to create a national holiday that would be a day for celebrating Scottish identity. He made a persuasive case and drew parallels between the economic benefits that there could be with the tremendous economic benefits that the Irish draw from celebrating St Patrick's day. Of course, it is not just in Ireland that St Patrick's day is successful; it is celebrated throughout the world by Irish expats and is particularly significant in North America. The committee heard evidence from retailers and those who are involved in the tourism industry that the creation of a St Andrew's day holiday would provide a substantial benefit to their businesses. Quite apart from that, it should be a day on which to celebrate Scottish identity and the diversity of our culture. Those objectives should receive widespread support.

I was, therefore, depressed and dismayed to see the terms of the Executive's amendment. As Mr Canavan said, it is no more than a cynical attempt to kick the issue into the long grass. The Enterprise and Culture Committee has already considered the issue, so what is the point of referring the matter back? What does that say about the four MSPs from the Executive parties who are on the committee—Susan Deacon, Christine May, Richard Baker and Jamie Stone—who approved the general principles of the bill? Are they not to be trusted by the Executive? What is the point of having committees undertake pre-legislative scrutiny if we are to dismiss what they say, even when the Executive has a majority membership of them?

I was flabbergasted to read that the Executive's amendment

“seeks to uphold the consensus across the Parliament that we should only legislate where necessary”.

In the past six years, we have had reams of ridiculous, unnecessary and unwanted pieces of legislation from the Executive. Frankly, if the Executive does not support the bill it should come out and say so. It should vote against the bill, not indulge in complicated subterfuge. Contrary to what I believe the Liberal Democrats were told at lunch time today, the Conservatives will vote against the Executive's amendment.

I turn, briefly, to my amendment. The committee heard strong evidence from employers that they did not wish an additional holiday to be granted for St Andrew's day because that would lead to extra costs, especially for small businesses that struggle to compete with larger rivals who could afford the staff to cover public holidays. They would have no objection to a St Andrew's day holiday, provided that it substituted an existing holiday at another time of year.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Which one?

Murdo Fraser: I will not be prescriptive about which day that might be; that could be dealt with at stage 2. We do not need an additional holiday.

We should ensure as widespread support as possible for the bill. It would be unfortunate if the bill were to succeed without the support of the business community and employers' organisations. By amending the bill in the way that I propose, we would ensure that there is genuine consensus throughout the country in support of a St Andrew's day holiday.

Some people will criticise the bill and say that it achieves virtually nothing in legal terms but is just about symbolism. However, symbolism is important. Parliament should be about more than just the bare bones of legislation and the dry dust of legal clauses; we should lead from the front, change public perceptions and set the agenda. We should support the motion.

I move amendment S2M-3356.1 to insert at end:

“but, in so doing, believes that a new bank holiday established as a result of the Bill should not be so established unless an existing bank holiday is no longer specified as a bank holiday.”

15:43

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I regret the fact that the Executive has lodged an amendment to send the bill back to the committee, given the fact that, as a member of the committee that considered the bill, I am satisfied that we took sufficient evidence and that there was sufficient

scope for discussion of whether we should approve the bill at stage 1.

Real benefits could come from having a bank holiday for St Andrew's day. It is wrong for some members to give the impression that the business community is in some way unified in opposition to the bill: it is not. The retail sector and the tourism sector are ambitious about what they could achieve through having a St Andrew's day bank holiday. Even some of those in the business community who are opposed to the bill are opposed to it purely on the basis that they would want a St Andrew's day holiday to replace an existing bank holiday; others just do not want another bank holiday full stop. Those who oppose the bill are divided on what they think should happen.

The Executive fails to recognise the economic benefits that could flow from the bill if there was a bank holiday in November—a time of the year when business is slow for both the retail market and our tourism sector. Some people—including the Executive, as we have heard—have argued that the bill would not allow us legally to enforce a St Andrew's day holiday. If that argument is turned on its head, it is an argument to abolish all bank holidays full stop. Why bother having any of them, if they are not legally enforceable? The reality is that the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill provides the only avenue under the Scotland Act 1998 that would allow a bank holiday to be created in Scotland.

I am particularly surprised at the Executive's narrow-minded attitude in failing to recognise the cultural benefits that could be gained by our having a St Andrew's day holiday. The Executive is taking its usual narrow attitude. It is frightened to have a St Andrew's day holiday because it is frightened that people will become a bit more nationalistic about Scotland and its culture. Some cultural spin-offs could come from the bill. We should consider what Ireland has achieved. It is surprising that the Executive does not seem to be able even to recognise that fact.

As ever when it comes to cultural matters, the Executive is good at talking the talk, but it is appalling when it comes to walking the walk. After the Enterprise and Culture Committee considered the bill in detail and published its unanimous report, the Executive decided to kick the bill back to the committee to try to find an alternative way to celebrate St Andrew's day. What happened was clear—the committee was unanimous. The members of the Executive parties supported the idea of the bill. It is strange that the Executive does not seem able to get its head around that.

The Executive wants to kick the bill back to the committee because it would not like the result. It wants to send back the bill in the hope that the

next stage 1 report will recommend that the Parliament vote down the general principles. That is typical of the control freakery that we have come to expect from the Executive. I hope that members across the Parliament will recognise that the Executive, in its amendment and by wanting to kick the bill back to the committee, is riding roughshod over the parliamentary process.

I hope that that will not happen, although I suspect that it will: yet again, we will find that the Liberal Democrat spines have taken an early recess and that the Lib Dems will kowtow to their masters in the Labour Party. I hope that members will respect a decision that was arrived at following detailed consideration by the Enterprise and Culture Committee and support the bill at stage 1.

15:47

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I always thought that the Parliament made the decisions on legislation, not the committees—the committees are part of the process, while the Parliament makes the final decisions.

I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. I congratulate Dennis Canavan on his efforts to have St Andrew's day recognised as a day for national celebration in Scotland and thank him for bringing the matter so far up the agenda. As the member of the Scottish Parliament whose constituency includes the ancient city of St Andrews, the significance of St Andrew's day is of particular resonance for me. I congratulate the St Andrew's week organisers on putting together, once again—I quote from the brochure—

“eight days of colourful events and activities celebrating the very best of Scotland's rich culture and cuisine”,

culminating on St Andrew's day.

St Andrew's week started with modest ambitions not so many years ago, with the primary aim of encouraging people to visit St Andrews and to celebrate St Andrew's day in St Andrews. The time has now come for Scotland to have not modest ambitions to celebrate St Andrew's day, but visionary aims to create a day of national celebration and, indeed, a national holiday when Scotland's rich heritage and ambitious future can be celebrated both here and by Scots throughout the world.

We should have a national day for Scotland, just as they do in France with Bastille day, in the United States of America with independence day and in Ireland with St Patrick's day. I believe that having such a day could give Scotland great opportunities to promote all that is good about our nation on the international stage. St Andrew's day seems to be the obvious day on which to celebrate our national day. That would allow Scotland to become the focus of the winter festival season,

launched on St Andrew's day and culminating in our unique celebrations for the new year.

I therefore welcome the intentions behind Dennis Canavan's bill. The policy memorandum states:

"The intention is to facilitate the creation of a 'National Day' in order to celebrate Scotland and its people in terms of culture, diversity, history, tradition, contemporary society, arts, sport, enterprise, international standing".

Unfortunately, the bill as introduced does not and will not deliver on that intention.

Michael Matheson: Spineless!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Iain Smith: The bill will not deliver. That is recognised by the very committee to which Mr Matheson referred. It is recognised in the committee's report, which makes it quite clear that the bill will not fulfil that policy intention.

I have long been a supporter of the principle of creating a national holiday for St Andrew's day; that is why I supported Dennis Canavan's bill proposal. However, the bill does not deliver that. In essence, the bill makes a technical amendment to the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971, which would allow—only allow, not force—banks not to deal on that day. The bill does not create a national holiday and frankly—

Dennis Canavan: Will the member give way?

Iain Smith: I am sorry, but I have only four minutes. I do not have time to take interventions.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Iain Smith is talking rubbish.

Iain Smith: I am not talking rubbish.

Banks will not take the day off. I would be very surprised if banks and financial institutions were to take the day off, so we would not be any further forward.

I disagree with one fundamental policy intention—it is included in the policy memorandum—of Dennis Canavan's bill. I refer to the intention to create an additional holiday. I have always believed that a St Andrew's day holiday should be created by replacing an existing holiday—my preference would be for the replacement of the spring bank holiday—as we did in the Scottish Parliament. We created a St Andrew's day holiday for our staff by replacing another holiday.

The case has not been made for creating an additional holiday. Dennis Canavan makes comparisons with other countries in his policy memorandum, but it is flawed because it does not take full account of the local holidays—

Dennis Canavan: Yes it does.

Iain Smith: It does not. I have read the policy memorandum. It does not take full account of local holidays that are additional to the bank holidays in Scotland.

Although I remain fully committed to the principle of having a St Andrew's day national holiday, I do not believe that Dennis Canavan's bill will deliver that. I would, therefore, be unable to support the bill in its present form at stage 3 and I am not sure that the bill could be amended to deliver a bill that I could support at stage 3. That is why I welcome the Executive's constructive amendment, which refers the bill back to the Enterprise and Culture Committee for further consideration. The amendment is not an attempt, as some claim, to kill the bill. On the contrary, it keeps the bill very much alive.

The Executive's amendment creates the opportunity for cross-party discussions so that we can find a way forward that can lead to the creation of St Andrew's day as Scotland's national day: a day of national celebration and holiday.

I very much hope that members will support that aim and respond positively to the opportunity. The Parliament is a legislature, not a debating society. We must get legislation right. Let us refer the bill back and get it right.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We reach the open debate. Time is tight if I am to include all eight members who have asked to participate.

15:52

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I join other members in congratulating Dennis Canavan on highlighting the need properly to celebrate St Andrew's day. It is a clear failing that there is no public recognition in Scotland of St Andrew's day.

I commend Dennis Canavan for his commitment to raising the profile of the day. It seems entirely appropriate that along with our new Scottish Parliament we should have greater recognition of our patron saint and that we should use the day to celebrate all that is good about Scotland. I note from the responses to the consultation that there is strong support for measures to ensure that St Andrew's day becomes a day of national celebration of Scotland's diversity of cultures, faiths and ethnic origins. As the consultation report points out, the fact that St Andrew was not a Scot could be a positive advantage in promoting the day as an international and multicultural celebration.

There is a lot of scope for improving the way in which St Andrew's day is celebrated, both here in Scotland and internationally. I call on the Executive to take a co-ordinated approach to

promoting the day and, in particular, the idea that St Andrew's day could be used for a celebration of our ethnic diversity.

Tricia Marwick: Can the member explain why we should expect anybody internationally to celebrate St Andrew's day when we cannot celebrate it in Scotland by means of a holiday?

Karen Whitefield: I will not take any lectures from the nationalists, who chose to vote down a proposal on St George's day being a national holiday in England when that proposal came before the House of Commons.

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): Rubbish.

Karen Whitefield: Check the voting record. I think that Scottish National Party members will find that one of the SNP MPs voted against that proposal.

I believe that the bill does not and cannot prevent employers from requiring employees to work on St Andrew's day. It is likely that many sections of the private sector could not or would not pass on a public holiday that was created to their employees. That strikes at the heart of the proposal in the bill.

I note from the report on the consultation that the bill is welcomed by the Scottish Retail Consortium. Much has been said about that in the debate. I presume that that means that the consortium anticipates that a public holiday on St Andrew's day will result in increased retail opportunities, which must mean that it does not anticipate that Scotland's shop workers will benefit from the proposed public holiday. I am sure that the Scottish Retail Consortium will say that shop workers would be paid at enhanced rates if they were required to work on the new holiday. Unfortunately, past experience leads me to doubt that that would be the case. However, I would welcome a commitment from the Scottish Retail Consortium that it would ensure that, if shop workers had to work on the public holiday, they would be given enhanced payments and time off in lieu.

It would be unfortunate if we were to create a holiday that applied only to public sector workers and to those who are better paid. To do so would leave some of our poorest workers, such as shop workers, without the benefits that others would enjoy. A day of celebration should not be the preserve of the public sector.

I applaud the intentions of the bill. In a newly devolved Scotland, it is right that we should set one day aside to celebrate our national identity. It is also right that that day should be St Andrew's day. However, I believe that there is much more that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish

Executive can do to raise the profile of St Andrew's day. I also believe that the creation of a new bank holiday will not in itself achieve that aim.

I hope that the minister will give a commitment to take the steps that are necessary to ensure that St Andrew's day becomes a broad and inclusive celebration of what it means to be a Scot. I hope that he will ensure that whatever action we take is sustainable. I also hope that St Andrew's day becomes as embedded in our culture as Burns day has become.

15:56

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): We are talking about a day on which the nation would celebrate itself and yet I do not hear much in the way of celebration from the Executive benches.

Curiously, the one big omission from the lists of national holidays is the United Kingdom. Perhaps that is because it is not quite British to celebrate one's country or perhaps the sensitivities of being a multinational state mean that folk have never wanted to fix on a single day for such a celebration for the reason that it would cause too much controversy. Whatever the reason, it should not detain us here in Scotland.

St Andrew is the patron saint of many countries and things including, rather diversely, fishmongers, gout and sore throats—I am not entirely sure how all that came about. At one and the same time, he is the patron saint of unmarried women and women who want to become mothers. That is an interesting juxtaposition, given the traditional view that the churches take on those matters. First and foremost, internationally as well as in Scotland, St Andrew's strong association is with Scotland. All of us know the stories and the mythology; indeed, people may not realise it but some of his relics are in St Mary's cathedral in Edinburgh.

St Andrew societies right across the globe help the diaspora to maintain a link with home. I remember growing up in Australia and taking part in St Andrew's day celebrations in that country. When I came back to Scotland, I was astounded to discover that there was virtually no celebration in this country. If there is an objection to Scotland alone in the UK having such a national day, one need only point out that other devolved countries are going down the national holiday road. I am thinking of Catalonia, Flanders, Wallonia and Quebec. Scotland should not be left behind, even if the Executive thinks that that is what should happen.

A moment's thought is all that is needed to realise the potential for the sort of event that could be organised around such a holiday. It would become the key trigger for events such as a

festival at Gretna that could have at its centre the various marriage-related traditions that are associated with St Andrew, of which there are many. It could also trigger a fishing festival or a big music festival—after all, St Andrew is the patron saint of singers.

People also say that St Andrew's day is in the off-season. Of course it is, but the tourist industry is always looking for opportunities to expand that season. That is why the industry is so much in favour of the St Andrew's day holiday. We can centre the holiday around roaring fires, ceilidhs and whisky; none of that sounds too bad to me, or anyone else. We can take a lesson from places such as Salzburg and Berlin, which make enormous money out of Christmas markets. In his intervention on the minister, Jim Wallace made a throwaway remark about shopping. Many cities across Europe make a big deal out of shopping; why on earth cannot we do the same?

When Celtic Connections was first launched, I remember people saying that a huge traditional music festival in Glasgow in the middle of January would never work. It did and it is now one of the biggest such festivals in the world.

I note that business people other than the CBI are more positive about the St Andrew's day proposal. I believe that the Executive's churlish response—that is the only way to describe what has happened in the chamber today—betrays a complete lack of ambition for Scotland and for the celebration of our culture. The Executive amendment suggests that its real problem is a reluctance to sanction anything that would be a celebration of the nation. Why should the rest of the world take it seriously if this country does not? Shame on the minister for his appalling statement today. Let us ditch the cringe, let us embrace St Andrew and let us give Scotland a break.

16:00

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): Today's debate has been passionate. Dennis Canavan made his contribution exceptionally well. Roseanna Cunningham has just taught me an awful lot about St Andrew and patron saints that I did not know. I was unaware that there was a patron saint of gout. We take something away from every debate.

There is a fine line between a meaningful but symbolic gesture and tokenism. Many who look at the Parliament say that we have crossed that line in the past. We must examine the bill carefully to ensure that we get it right this time. One of the main criticisms that has been levelled at the Parliament has been its desire to legislate too readily. That problem afflicts all legislatures; it is not unique to this one.

I suspect that there is cross-party support for making St Andrew's day more prominent and making more of it. The question that we must ask is whether the bill is the right vehicle to address that. Tom McCabe's amendment makes it clear where the Executive parties stand. Having looked at it, I do not think that the bill would entail significant compliance costs. It does not look to be particularly onerous. The Executive has supported many other pieces of legislation that have been rather more onerous for business and for others.

To some extent, the bill is symbolic—let us not pretend that it is anything else—and by nature I am sceptical of symbolism in our laws. If by passing the bill we would give impetus to our tourism sector and bring something else to our retail and other sectors, then we must at least give the bill careful consideration. Some of the imaginative proposals on how to make use of St Andrew's day may not have entered the debate had the bill not been introduced. Dennis Canavan should be congratulated on stimulating the debate.

Some people are concerned about introducing an additional holiday into the Scottish calendar. As my colleague Murdo Fraser's amendment indicates, there is a relatively simple answer to that—substitute a St Andrew's day holiday for another, although which one might be the subject of an equally passionate debate.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): Does Derek Brownlee sense the hypocrisy? This Parliament accords itself something like four months of recess. The working people out there are looking for one additional day. For goodness' sake, the member should try to present himself in a better light.

Derek Brownlee: I would not accuse any member of hypocrisy. I do not know what other members used the recess for, but it was not entirely a holiday for me.

Many businesses, particularly small ones, have a legitimate concern about the impact of an additional holiday. We should not dismiss those concerns out of hand, although Dennis Canavan made some interesting points about what the bill would do and we should be aware of the potential benefits. I see an opportunity to make more of St Andrew's day than we have done, and an opportunity for the Parliament to give a lead in doing so. We should not be afraid to make more of our Scottish culture and history than we have done. That does not do anything for the SNP. Making more of our culture and history is to do with Scottish patriotism, which is utterly unconnected with nationalism, unionism or anything else.

Dennis Canavan should be congratulated on his vision of what St Andrew's day could become, and

on introducing the bill, which deserves further debate.

16:04

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): Well done, Dennis. Not so well done the Executive. However, I recognise that the people who composed the Executive amendment believed that they were being constructive. I do not malign their intention, but I criticise their judgment. I do not understand why all the good things that are mentioned in the amendment could not be achieved once the bill's general principles have been agreed to. It is possible to do all sorts of all-singing, all-dancing things by agreeing to the bill's general principles at stage 1, just as well as by remitting it.

I take particular exception to the amendment in that it misquotes the committee report. Unfortunately, paragraph 5 of the report contains a typo, which does not help, but I think that it is trying to say that the bill does not of itself fulfil the purpose of creating a national day of celebration. The amendment that I am being asked to support—but will not—says that the report

“concludes that the Bill does not fulfil this purpose”.

There is a serious difference between what the report says and what the amendment says that it says and I think that it is not right that a parliamentary amendment should misquote a document on which it claims to found.

The bill does not claim to do everything. It wishes there to be a great house—or a church or a temple or some other structure—of Scottish celebration for St Andrew's day. The bill seeks to create a door. It could be argued that if one creates a door, one does not have a house, but without a door one will not have a house. Unless we agree to the bill's general principles and show keenness and support for the concept that it embodies, we will not make great progress with having all sorts of all-singing, all-dancing St Andrew's day celebrations.

It is important that we should celebrate St Andrew's day. I have supported that cause for many years and will continue to do so. We will assist the cause more by getting the bill on its way. After stage 1, all sorts of amendments can be introduced and people can argue about whether St Andrew's day should be an additional holiday.

The minister criticised Dennis Canavan on the grounds that it was not necessary to legislate and that the bill would not create a national holiday. However, it is not possible to create a national holiday. It seems perverse in the extreme to criticise a member for introducing a bill that cunningly stays within the law and does not break

it. Although I have no doubt that the Executive's intentions are excellent, I think that its performance is not at all satisfactory. The bill should go ahead and should be improved on once its general principles have been agreed to.

16:07

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): I join other members in thanking Dennis Canavan and I acknowledge that, by bringing the matter to the Parliament, he has generated a liveliness, an enthusiasm and a real sense of what it means to legislate.

In its deliberations on the bill, the committee heard that we are one of the very few countries in the world—possibly the only one—that does not celebrate its national day. I think that I speak for all members of the committee when I say that we very much wished that it would be possible for Dennis Canavan's objective to be fulfilled. I have to confess that I wanted the bill to be able to do what it says on the tin.

Although I recognise Dennis Canavan's long-standing commitment to a St Andrew's day holiday, I know that the Executive has been considering proposals for improving the celebration of St Andrew's day for some time. It is perhaps a little unfortunate that those proposals had not progressed to a stage that would have allowed them to be examined by the committee during its stage 1 consideration of the bill.

It was evident from the evidence that we took that a holiday on St Andrew's day or a day of national celebration would provide the opportunity to concentrate a large number of key activities around that date. However, it was also evident that, to do that, the creation of a holiday was not necessary and that it was not within the gift of the Scottish Parliament to create a holiday, in that although it could be legislated for, it could not be enforced.

Tricia Marwick: Will Christine May explain why somebody who was brought up in Dublin and celebrated St Andrew's day is going to vote today to deny the people of Central Fife the right to celebrate their national day?

Christine May: Tricia Marwick perhaps meant to say St Patrick's day. I will come to that in a moment.

Paragraph 3 of the policy memorandum says that the bill's intention is

“to facilitate the creation of a ‘National Day’ in order to celebrate Scotland and its people,”

and so on; and we have heard about that. When I was a child growing up in Ireland, I celebrated St Patrick's day. I spent a lot of it in church, because that was how it was celebrated in Ireland at the

time. We did not do parades and things. However, when I grew older and started to work, I never got St Patrick's day off. Many members will know that my original profession was in the catering trade. I had no choice but to work on St Patrick's day, because I worked in a service industry. I was one of the many people who facilitated others on that day off.

The Executive's amendment asks us to give a little more time to consider the practicalities around the bill's proposal before taking a final decision in the chamber on whether we agree to the bill's general principles and to legislate for a bank holiday. The convener of the Enterprise and Culture Committee will confirm that he and I discussed that in an unofficial conversation before the committee's final meeting on the bill. It is my view that we do not have enough information at this stage. I would welcome the opportunity for further discussion. Mr Brownlee said that he wants us to get the bill right and to have the time to do that, which seems to me to be a good reason for asking the Conservatives to support our amendment.

16:11

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): On Tuesday night I attended the dinner to celebrate the Carnegie awards. There were guests from all over the world at that prestigious event, which was held in the National Museum of Scotland. It was a celebration of all the very best in Scotland's culture. The food, which was excellent, was from all over Scotland and some of the dishes were based on traditional Scottish dishes. The National Youth Choir of Scotland sang some of the best known and loved Scottish ballads. The evening ended with the skirl of the pipes as two pipers marched through the auditorium. Hanging above us was our national flag, the cross of St Andrew.

I know that some members will say that our cultural heritage is not going to change and that it is here for ever. During the committee's inquiry reference was made to Burns night, which is celebrated round the world without any need for a public holiday. However, with all due respect, Burns is not the patron saint of Scotland and is not recognised by a national flag. The proposed holiday is about raising the awareness of Scotland's past—our culture and heritage—which makes us what we are today and which has given us this Parliament, which is not an assembly with no real powers, as is the case in Wales.

For the Executive not whole-heartedly to support the bill is, frankly, beyond belief. The evidence presented to the committee was overwhelmingly in support of having a St Andrew's day holiday. Even those who had concerns about a holiday wanted

to associate themselves with the principle that we should celebrate this national day. St Andrew's day appears to be well celebrated in many parts of the world, but it passes relatively unnoticed in our own country. In fact, our workforce is almost at the bottom of the league in Europe for paid holidays. Surely agreeing to the bill's proposal will send a strong message to the workforce that their employers are concerned about their well-being.

Questions were asked about whether a St Andrew's day holiday would be a school holiday. Obviously, there would have to be specific consultation on that. However, it is interesting to note that Angus Council already recognises St Andrew's day as a holiday for council staff and for schools in its locality. The council reviews the holiday timing every year and bases its decision on the position of 30 November.

A St Andrew's day holiday would be an important opportunity to help instil in our young people pride in our culture, history and tradition. I hope, of course, that the tourist boards do as they intimated in evidence they would do, which is plan special events to mark that day in the calendar.

The Executive obviously has concerns about the bill. If it is already working on proposals for a more effective—to use its word—way of celebrating St Andrew's day, I hope that those proposals will be introduced for debate at stage 2. Stage 2 in committee would be the proper place for what the Executive describes as further work on developing the proposals. Going through that process would be preferable to referring the issue back to the committee for a further report on the general principles, which I assume would mean another stage 1 debate.

I understood that the aim of the Parliament was to work in a more consensual way for the good of Scotland. I therefore make a serious plea. The nature of the bill transcends party politics; I urge the Executive to acknowledge that by giving a free vote to its members. I hope that that will enable the bill to proceed.

16:15

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Dennis Canavan deserves to be congratulated on the work that he has put into this proposal and on bringing the debate to the chamber today. However, there is a problem. Security staff might have to become involved because something is missing. A shiver is trying to attach itself to a spine on the Executive benches, but without success.

There is a test for this Parliament today—a test of whether we can rise above party-political sectarianism and be adult and mature enough to recognise that we are paid enough to think for

ourselves, rather than being told how to vote at 5 o'clock tonight.

Seventy-five members of this Parliament were prepared to support Dennis Canavan's proposal to deliver a public holiday on St Andrew's day for Scotland. I accept that some MSPs might have thought, "Well, okay, let's debate the proposal. I don't know if I'll support it in future, but I want it at least to be debated, so I'll sign up to the proposal." However, what happens next is unique. After gathering 75 signatures, the proposal goes for its first stage of detailed scrutiny to the Enterprise and Culture Committee. There, if there are major problems, we might expect the committee to vote the proposal down, or to reach a split decision. However, there is unanimous endorsement of the proposal. Therefore, what some of the 75 do next beggars belief.

No wonder Mr Smith's contribution was so meek. He is embarrassed that he is prepared to support something until he is given instructions.

Iain Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

Tommy Sheridan: He should sit down. He would not take anybody else's interventions, saying he had only four minutes. He gets his instructions, telling him what to do. Iain is big enough—and, well, adult enough, to be polite to him—to think for himself. He should have the courage of his convictions. He should stick by his original decision to support the bill.

What process is followed in this Parliament? We have detailed committee examination of proposals. Then we have a stage 1 debate. It is very rare that a bill that has reached its stage 1 debate will not be amended at stage 2. I do not think a bill has ever not been amended. Of all the bills that have come through the Parliament, I do not think that one has passed through the stage 1 debate on its general principles and then not been amended at stage 2. It is at stage 2 that the worries are dealt with. The stage 2 committee analysis—or even the stage 3 consideration—is where amendments, additions and improvements are properly introduced.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

Tommy Sheridan: I would have taken an intervention from Nora, but I am in my last minute and do not have any time.

We have a duty today to stand up for Scotland and allow a new and reinvigorated cultural renaissance that recognises our patron saint. That is a good enough reason in itself to celebrate not only our rich cultural history, but our current diverse culture here in our small nation. But I will tell members why else it is a good idea. Scottish

workers work longer hours and have fewer public holidays than workers in any other of the 25 European Union nations.

The average number of public holidays in the 25 European Union nations is 12; in Scotland, we have only eight. At least let us get to 10, like Northern Ireland. If it is good enough for the Northern Irish to celebrate St Patrick's day and the battle of the Boyne, surely we should be allowed to celebrate St Andrew and Robert Burns. Let us support the general principle and stand up for Scotland's workers.

16:20

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, pay tribute to Dennis Canavan's work. As convener of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, I make it clear that I am utterly opposed to that part of the Executive amendment that calls for the bill to be referred back to the committee. I ask the Presiding Officer to give us a ruling, before the vote at 5 o'clock, on the competence of the Executive's amendment, as it is factually inaccurate in that it does not quote the committee's report accurately.

I am opposed to the proposal to refer the bill back to the committee for three reasons. First, the committee has already done the work—we have reported on the general principles of the bill, with the unanimous recommendation that the general principles be accepted. Secondly, if we repeat the exercise, there will be no way in which the Executive will get its proposed bankruptcy bill through on its timescale. The third and real reason is that our heads do not button up the back. The real reason that the Executive wants to refer the bill back to the committee is so that it can whip the Executive members on the committee to do down the bill so that it is not embarrassed by having to vote it down in the Parliament. The real reason why Lanarkshire Labour tactics are being employed is to try to butcher the bill.

I am the convener of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, but the Executive neither informed me of its proposal to refer the bill back to the committee nor consulted me as to the viability of doing so. However, I am not surprised at that, given the incompetence that the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform and the Executive have shown in their handling of the bill. The Executive submitted its evidence one working day before the report was produced. The committee members agreed unanimously that I should write on their behalf to the Minister for Parliamentary Business to complain about the contemptuous way in which the Executive dealt with the committee in relation to the bill.

Let me make it absolutely clear that sending the bill back to the committee to repeat work that it

has already done is not only absurd, but will have consequences for other key aspects of the Executive's legislative programme.

The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon): Will the member take an intervention?

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

The committee considered the bill in detail. We heard oral evidence and we read the results of the consultation that Dennis Canavan undertook before the bill came to the committee and the written evidence that we received from numerous bodies. The support for the bill was overwhelming. Of course we need more time to consider the bill in detail, but that is the purpose of stage 2 and why we would set aside plenty of time for that. I give the Executive an undertaking to set aside plenty of time—as we planned—to deal with stage 2 to ensure that we end up with a good or an even better bill.

To throw out the bill today would begin the destruction of the committee system. The minute that we bring the whips into the committees or use the whips in the Parliament to overrule a committee's unanimous recommendation, that spells the end of the committee system. We are told that the committee system is the second house in Scotland, but we cannot be the second house and an independent scrutineer of legislation while taking our orders from Lanarkshire Labour at the same time.

16:25

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I say to Alex Neil that I am Lanarkshire Labour and proud of it.

This has been an interesting and passionate debate. As the new member of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, I wonder what will be placed on my shoulders if the motion is agreed to.

Alex Neil: On a technical note, I advise Karen Gillon that she will not become a member of the committee until 5 o'clock.

Karen Gillon: Okay. As the potential new member of the committee, I wonder what I have let myself in for.

Margo MacDonald: The member asked what has been placed on her shoulders; it is the shackles that have been placed around her ankles that she should be concerned about.

Karen Gillon: Margo MacDonald knows me—I am always up for a fight.

I certainly respect Dennis Canavan's commitment to the issue and his desire to see a new national holiday. We have heard two different

views today: Tommy Sheridan, who gave a rousing and loud contribution, wants to stick up for the workers, give them more holidays and redress the balance; however, the Tories do not want to give workers more holidays. For the Tories and Fergus Ewing, who was shouting from the sidelines, the proposal is about taking away May day—the real workers' holiday—as a public holiday. I am not prepared to sign up to that.

Murdo Fraser: Does Karen Gillon appreciate that if the bill proceeds there will be an opportunity at stage 2 to vote on which alternative bank holiday should be removed? That would be determined by the committee and then by Parliament. If members voted for May day, or any other holiday, to be removed, that is what would happen.

Karen Gillon: My colleagues are suggesting that Murdo Fraser has a hidden agenda, but it is not particularly well hidden. The Tories have wanted to get rid of May day for as long as I can remember, because the real reason for it was to give workers rights. I thought that Dennis Canavan's bill was about giving workers new holidays, not replacing ones that they already have. I disagree with my colleague Iain Smith, who wants to take away a holiday from workers. If we are going to make St Andrew's day a public holiday, it should be an additional public holiday. If we are serious about the proposal, it should not simply be about exchanging one holiday for another.

I am interested in the sudden conversion of the Scottish Retail Consortium to the idea of more public holidays. It seems that there would be more public holidays for everybody—except people who work in shops. I am sure that the consortium's conversion to public holidays will follow through into our consideration of my colleague Karen Whitefield's bill on imposing the public holiday on new year's day in Scotland for shop workers.

We are being asked to make a difficult decision. Some would like the bill as it stands to proceed to stage 2; they say that we can amend it. I am not convinced about that yet—I will listen to Dennis Canavan's comments about how the bill can be amended—because I do not believe that the purpose of amendments is to wreck a bill. In amending a bill of this nature, which, as the committee report acknowledges, is not able to do what it sets out to do, we could find ourselves in contravention of the Parliament's standing orders. I would welcome Dennis Canavan's comments on that. I would also welcome the comments of the minister, who has suggested that we refer the bill back to the committee. Given that I will be a new member of the committee, I would be grateful if he would tell us what he wants to come out of that second inquiry.

In considering the proposal, we have to be clear that we are not placing an additional burden on the public sector or on the private sector. I want to be sure that anything that I sign up to will have equal weight throughout Scotland and will not be something that some people get and others do not. I know that some have taken exception to people saying that if everybody does not get the holiday, nobody should get it, but if we are truly to celebrate St Andrew and have a public holiday on St Andrew's day, every worker in Scotland should be entitled to that new holiday; it should not be something for those who work in the public sector but not those in some sections of the private sector who are the lowest paid with the worst terms and conditions.

16:30

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): This has been a passionate, sometimes eloquent and even erudite debate, and I have enjoyed listening to it. As a native and resident of St Andrews, I take particular pleasure in summing up for the Conservatives today.

We have heard about the fairly loose connections that our patron saint had with the town that bears his name. Nonetheless, wherever one goes in the world, one finds that Scots remember their heritage in St Andrew's societies and celebrations. I am aware of at least five towns that were settled in the new world of the Americas and Australia that bear the name St Andrews. It is estimated that there are more than 25 million people with Scots blood in them throughout the world. The First Minister talked this morning about his forthcoming visit to Canada, which, I gather, is partly intended to persuade exiled Scots to come home. That is laudable, and only today I heard that Billy Connolly is heading back home—perhaps Sir Sean will not be far behind.

However, we have always lacked a focal date around which we can organise the celebration of all things Scottish. In a sense, we have had too many national days. In Edinburgh and elsewhere, hogmanay is a major focus and money spinner, and Burns day, on 25 January, is another major day to commemorate. However, neither of those days fulfils all the requirements of a national day.

As we have heard, the Irish also have a diaspora. However, our Celtic cousins have, as usual, been far more successful at promoting their culture and nationhood than have the Scots, as Michael Matheson and others indicated.

On 17 March, St Patrick's day is celebrated throughout the world, not least at an excellent party in the city of Edinburgh. I wonder whether something similar is held in Dublin on 30 November. Indeed, I wonder whether anyone in

Ireland—never mind the rest of the world—knows what 30 November is.

If we are serious about raising Scotland's profile, having a national day upon which we can build our image worldwide is an idea whose time has come.

However, I have a huge amount of sympathy with manufacturers and others who must count the cost of further compulsory holidays. We heard from some of them at the recent enterprise forum that was held in this chamber. Unlike Jack McConnell, having listened to their speeches, I did not think that those people were idiots; I think that they made a lot of sense. For that reason, while I recognise Dennis Canavan's initiative and the hard work that he has done to bring this bill to the Parliament, I do not believe that a St Andrew's day holiday should be in addition to the current holidays.

Murdo Fraser was asked which holiday he would swap for St Andrew's day. Of course, people could come up with many ideas. It is only partly with my tongue in my cheek that I say that, given that new Labour wants to move away from the shibboleths of its old red past, if there are two holidays in May, why should one or other of them not be given up? I leave it to those on the Labour benches to suggest which one they would like to give up.

I do not think that Tom McCabe convinced anyone that there are ways in which St Andrew's day could be celebrated without a holiday. I was a member of the St Andrew's day committee in my native town and I remember the great difficulty that we had in building a programme of events without having a recognised focal date upon which we could concentrate. What a shot in the arm it would be to that hard-working committee in St Andrews and to Scottish tourism in general if we were to celebrate our national day with a holiday, as other nations do.

Sure, a vote for the bill would not, in itself, create a public holiday. As I understand it, the Scottish Parliament is not legislatively competent to create one or enforce it. However, it has the power to provide the banks with an opportunity to give their employees a holiday. What on earth is wrong with that? I urge everyone to support the bill and see where it leads us at stage 2.

16:34

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I congratulate Dennis Canavan on bringing this bill to the chamber. I also congratulate Donald Gorrie on his objectivity and on his door analogy, which has registered well. In addition, I would like to thank the 75 members who supported the bill.

Before I proceed, I should declare my interest as a non-remunerated founding director of the

Scotland Funds, which is a body that seeks to activate the diaspora—in the United States of America, initially, and elsewhere—and involve it in the celebration of Scottish values at home and abroad. That organisation would undoubtedly benefit from the creation of a St Andrew's day holiday.

Today's debate has generated real passion, but it has also generated some red herrings. Karen Whitefield talked about the Westminster vote on the proposal for a St George's day holiday, but that was a proposal to create a holiday in place of the May day public holiday. The SNP member who voted against it was accompanied by a phalanx of Labour people. I trust that Karen Whitefield would have voted with us if she had been there.

Last week, the First Minister uttered some positive words about St Andrew's day, but I have to remind him that procrastination is the thief of time. Procrastination will do us no favours and it will make little impact on our busy, highly congested world, which has to deal with many competing messages. Imagine where Ireland would be without the formal momentum that it has created behind St Patrick's day. If members do a Google search for "St Patrick's day", as I did yesterday, they will find 22.2 million hits. There is a lot behind it.

I firmly believe that the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill offers the legitimacy, profile and momentum that Dennis Canavan, his supporters and the First Minister want it to have. It is simply a case of chicken and egg, or the concept that is encapsulated in Kevin Costner's "Field of Dreams": build it and they will come—in this case, create it and they will celebrate.

Margo MacDonald: Would the member care to comment on what the opinion outside the Parliament will be? How well will Scots understand the decision to dump the idea?

Jim Mather: I thank the member for that. I can tell her that there will be condemnation across the planet. My e-mail inbox is already full of messages from people from Baltimore and various other places. We will be condemned for failing to leverage a major asset.

If the First Minister thinks that there is an issue about educating people to use a St Andrew's day holiday, there are lots of lessons that we can draw from abroad. People are ready and waiting for us to introduce the holiday and they are looking for the signal. That signal needs to be given quickly.

The proposition is simple. Bertie Ahern is able to talk about the way in which St Patrick's day converts goodwill and affection for Ireland into tangibles such as investment, trade and people coming to live in Ireland, to be educated and build houses there and so on. Dennis Canavan's bill

proposes the creation of a St Andrew's day holiday, which will broadcast Scottishness and give people a chance to participate. The proposition is made in the passionate belief that the holiday will be rewarding and will be good for the people of Scotland. The opposing proposition is that we should slow the process down, do nothing and pretend that there is no demand, that we are not ready and that it could be expensive.

One of the propositions—Dennis Canavan's—genuinely maximises the benefit. The committee work has already been done and I strongly urge the Parliament not to require it to be done again. I urge the Parliament to listen to Alex Neil's message that the bill could well be killed in committee. The bill should legitimately go on to stage 2. That will broadcast the message that Scotland is open for business and is willing to leverage its assets, in line with what Margo MacDonald said. If we do not do that, we run the risk not only of failing to maximise those assets but of permanently damaging our committee system.

16:38

The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business

(George Lyon): I, too, begin by congratulating Dennis Canavan on bringing forward the proposition and raising what has been a passionate debate on the right way to celebrate St Andrew's day. I recognise that there is support throughout the chamber for a celebration of St Andrew's day and that it should be an occasion of national pride and a celebration of Scottish culture and heritage. I recognise that there is support for the proposition, but the question that faces us all is how we can deliver on that vision.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Will the minister guarantee that the Executive will support the committee in bringing the proposal back at stage 1 in the next few months?

George Lyon: I certainly give that assurance. We expect the committee to bring the proposal back as quickly as possible when it has further considered how a St Andrew's day celebration of the sort that members have reflected on during today's debate can be delivered

The Enterprise and Culture Committee's report says of Dennis Canavan's desire for

"this new bank holiday, falling ... on or near St Andrew's Day, to become a 'national day of celebration'"

that the bill does not

"of itself fulfil this purpose. The establishment of an additional bank holiday does not place a statutory obligation on employers to grant it as part of employee holiday entitlement."

In the light of the committee's findings, it is surely incumbent on the Parliament to consider and scrutinise matters further before the bill progresses.

Tricia Marwick: I confess that I am totally confused about the Executive amendment. If the Executive opposes a bank holiday for St Andrew's day, the bill cannot be amended to remove such a provision. Other provisions might be added, but that provision cannot be removed, because to do so would destroy the bill. An amendment to do that would not be accepted, so what is the point of referring the bill back to the committee?

George Lyon: I am coming to why we should refer the bill back to the committee. Given the committee's finding that the bill will not deliver Dennis Canavan's objectives, it is only sensible to refer the bill back to the committee to do further work and to seek answers to the questions before the bill heads to stage 2 for amendment. Clarity is needed.

Murdo Fraser and others asked further questions during the debate. The principle in the bill is that an extra bank holiday should be created, but the Tories, including Murdo Fraser, seek an alternative. The principle that he and the other Tories adopt is that St Andrew's day should be a substitute for an existing bank holiday. If that happened, which bank holiday would we choose? If the holiday was a substitute not for a bank holiday but for a local holiday, how would that be achieved? How would we ensure in practice that workers had the day off?

Murdo Fraser: Will the minister give way?

George Lyon: I will take a short intervention as I do not have much time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The intervention must be brief as the minister is in his last minute.

Murdo Fraser: The minister must understand that such matters can be dealt with by stage 2 amendments in the normal passage of a bill. Will he explain—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is fine, Mr Fraser. Minister, you are in your last minute.

George Lyon: We do not have clarity about what members want. Michael Matheson accuses us of riding roughshod over Parliament. Since when did asking the committee to do a little more work to answer such questions amount to riding roughshod over Parliament?

Tommy Sheridan and others launched personal attacks on the Liberal Democrats. At least the Liberal Democrats have the backbone to stand up and point out that the bill does not deliver the objective that Dennis Canavan seeks to achieve. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, Mr Matheson.

George Lyon: It is not just me or the Executive that says that, but Murdo Fraser, Michael Matheson, Alex Neil, Jamie Stone, Susan Deacon, Christine May and Richard Baker. Their report makes the position clear. The committee is unanimous that the bill does not deliver Dennis Canavan's objectives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must finish now.

George Lyon: I ask all members who sincerely wish St Andrew's day to be marked as a day of national pride in and celebration of Scottish culture and heritage and who wish to give people time off to celebrate to refer the bill back to the committee and give the committee further time to make proposals to achieve those laudable objectives.

16:43

Dennis Canavan: I thank all members who participated in the debate; I apologise if I do not have time to mention them all by name. The debate has been good and interesting. It has reflected the breadth of support for my bill's general principles. If the vote at 5 o'clock simply reflected the tenor of the debate, I would win it hands down.

Several members who spoke are Enterprise and Culture Committee members. I am grateful for the work that the committee did and for the speeches that committee members made. Michael Matheson, Shiona Baird and Alex Neil—the committee's convener—made valuable contributions. I repeat that the committee, including Christine May, who has reservations, took a unanimous decision to recommend approval of the bill in principle by the entire Parliament.

The Executive insults the committee by proposing to refer the bill back to it, because that implies that it has not done its homework on the bill. The truth of the matter is that it was, if anyone, the Executive that did not do its homework. The consultation on the bill was launched 15 months ago and the bill itself was published five months ago, yet the Executive did not provide a response until last week when, at the 11th hour, Tom McCabe sent us a one-page letter that contained no new evidence but simply expressed the Executive's view that it had some reservations about the bill, mainly because of the business community and because the bill might not achieve its intended aim.

Let me respond to two members—Karen Whitefield and Karen Gillon—whose speeches had merit but who displayed some

misunderstanding of the bill. Rightly expressing her concern for shop workers, Karen Whitefield asked whether all such workers would receive the St Andrew's day bank holiday. The answer is that they probably would not get the holiday, given that they do not all get bank holidays at the moment. At our press launch yesterday, a representative from the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers said categorically that his trade union supports the bill. If shop workers do not get the day off, USDAW will try its best to negotiate a day off in lieu or a premium payment for those who are expected to work on the day.

Karen Whitefield: The Scottish Retail Consortium's members make commitments about extra-time payments and time off in lieu. I want an assurance from the Scottish Retail Consortium that it will hold its members to those commitments.

Dennis Canavan: There are certain things that this Parliament can do, but employment law is a matter that is reserved to Westminster. This Parliament does not have the power to enforce the observation of a holiday. The bill is the only mechanism that is available to the Parliament to facilitate the establishment of a bank holiday and thereby encourage employers to give their workers the day off and trade unions to negotiate with employers to ensure that as many workers as possible get the day off.

Karen Gillon expressed concern about May day. Does she seriously argue that a majority in the Parliament or in the Enterprise and Culture Committee would abolish May day? I think not. I was in the Westminster Parliament when Harold Wilson's Labour Government created the May day holiday. Indeed, I voted for it. The instrument that was used to create the May day holiday is exactly the same as the one that I ask this Parliament to agree to in achieving a St Andrew's day bank holiday. Under the Scotland Act 1998, the power in schedule 1 to the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971 is now devolved to this Parliament.

The weakest two contributions to today's debate came from the Executive ministers. They said that the bill would not enforce a bank holiday, but I have never claimed that it would do so. However, the bill will certainly facilitate the creation of such a holiday. Neither Tom McCabe nor George Lyon put forward a convincing case.

To sum up, this simple one-page bill has the backing of the overwhelming majority of the people of Scotland. Initially, it also had the backing of 75 members. All of them apparently intended to vote to agree to the principles of the bill until the Executive lodged its last-minute amendment, which has been cobbled up to delay the bill or, possibly, to kill it off at a future point.

I remind members of Edwin Morgan's poem, which Sheena Wellington—who is one of the strongest supporters of my bill—read out at the opening of the Parliament building:

"What do the people want of the place?
They want it to be filled with thinking persons
as open and adventurous as its architecture.
A nest of fearties is what they do not want.
A symposium of procrastinators is what they do not want.
A phalanx of forelock-tuggers is what they do not want.
And perhaps above all the droopy mantra of 'it wizny me'
is what they do not want."

I therefore appeal to all MSPs, particularly those who supported the bill by signing the initial proposal, to consider themselves here, at this moment, first and foremost as representatives of the people rather than mere party hacks. The overwhelming majority of the people of Scotland want a St Andrew's day holiday. We can help to achieve that by voting against the Executive amendment and voting for the general principles of the bill, which will present an opportunity for all Scots to celebrate our national identity and to promote Scotland on the international stage.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is consideration of a Sewel motion. I ask Ross Finnie to move motion S2M-3327, on the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the provisions in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill relating to devolved matters and those that confer executive functions on the Scottish Ministers should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[Ross Finnie.]

16:51

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): The Scottish National Party opposed this Sewel motion when it came before the Environment and Rural Development Committee on 22 June. Now that it is before the full Parliament, we appeal to members to reject it.

There is no doubt that the coalition Government is abusing the Sewel mechanism. The architects of that mechanism expected it to be used sparingly, but remarkably we are today debating the 64th Sewel motion to come before us in just six years, and we shall be debating the 65th in a few minutes' time. Indeed, one academic referred in today's press to the Sewel motion process as

"One that has eroded the distinctive ethos of the Scottish Parliament over the past six years".

Those affected by the issue that we are discussing are appealing to the Parliament to take responsibility, not to pass the buck back to Westminster. Prior to discussions at committee on the impact on Scotland of the United Kingdom Government's Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill, to which the Sewel motion relates, representations were made by users of Scotland's canal network, who are members of the Scottish Inland Waterways Association, on the proposal to establish a UK inland waterways advisory council. They do not want the Scottish Parliament to pass to the UK Government in London responsibility for establishing a UK body. Instead, now that we have our own Parliament, they want us to do what is right for Scotland and to legislate for the creation of a Scottish equivalent.

Boat owners believe that an advisory body based south of the border will

"not be sufficiently focussed to meet the needs of the waterways users in Scotland."

I ask members to note that responsibility for Scottish waterways is devolved to this Parliament, but under the UK bill the advisory board will remain at UK level.

In short, it is clear that boat owners who use our canals do not trust a UK advisory body to look after their interests or to give Scottish ministers appropriate and informed advice on relevant matters, because the body will be based south of the border and the vast majority of its members will be from there. I quote from the written representation received by the Environment and Rural Development Committee from the chairman of the Scottish Inland Waterways Association, who wrote of the UK board that,

"with 2000 miles of waterway to deal with in England and Wales they do not have sufficient interest or knowledge of the Scottish waterway system to devote the time or the effort needed to deal adequately with the situation up here."

He went on to say:

"Any council set up to advise Scottish Ministers and the Waterways Board on matters relevant to inland waterways in Scotland can only be fully effective if it is constituted in Scotland with members who are fully aware of the Scottish waterways situation, their beauty, their potential and the problems associated with their operation. This is not achievable with an English based body even with a token Scottish representation."

To strengthen the case for opposing the motion, I turn to the revealing statement in the minister's memorandum to the committee. He said:

"Given the difficulties in the short term of securing this change through Scottish legislation these powers might be best achieved by enactment at Westminster under the terms of the Sewel Convention, although the Committee is asked to note that this presents some complexities for the NERC Bill".

The Scottish National Party appeals to the Parliament not to allow the minister off the hook or to abdicate his responsibilities by choosing a lazy, easy option through the Sewel process. Instead, he should listen to those who are directly affected by the bill and to those who elected members of the Scottish Parliament to legislate on their behalf.

I appeal to the Parliament to reject the motion.

16:55

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): Members will not have been surprised to hear that Richard Lochhead is opposed to a UK body. That is a perfectly legitimate position for the Scottish National Party to take, but we should be clear about the SNP's froth and agitation about the Sewel motion.

The matters in the bill are being perfectly properly dealt with and concern a number of technical adjustments, mainly to reform certain cross-border public authorities. The bill will reform the constitutions of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, which operates on a UK basis, and the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council, to which Richard Lochhead referred. That advisory

council has been in existence for some time. It was reviewed in 2003 and the technical amendments that will be made will simply ensure that it is responsible to both the UK Parliament and the Scottish Parliament.

The bill also covers the removal from statute of three long-obsolete committees—the Great Britain-wide Consumer Committee, the Committee of Investigation and the Hill Farming Advisory Committee, which has not met in Scotland for more than two years—and provides a means of extending the purposes of the national nature reserves and local nature reserves in Scotland to clarify that they can be used, as in practice they already are, for wider public enjoyment and not simply for the current statutory reasons of scientific research.

People should take a reasonable view of what is in this UK bill, which will make minor technical adjustments in a convenient and sensible way. The SNP opposes the motion and makes a completely fallacious case, saying that Sewel motions are somehow anti-democratic. Its case is simply not proven by the facts. I invite members to support the motion.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Civil Aviation Bill

16:57

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of a Sewel motion. I ask Margaret Curran to move motion S2M-3328, on the Civil Aviation Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the provisions in the Civil Aviation Bill, so far as they confer functions on the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—
[Ms Margaret Curran.]

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

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Motion

16:57

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): For the next item of business, I ask Nora Radcliffe to move motion S2M-3389, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, on membership of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's proposal to appoint Margaret Smith to be a member of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.—
[*Nora Radcliffe.*]

The Presiding Officer: Again, the question will be put at decision time.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:58

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of five Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Margaret Curran to move motions S2M-3373 and S2M-3374, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and motions S2M-3395 to S2M-3397, on committee membership.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Amendment of Specified Authorities) Order 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Treatment of Office or Body as Specified Authority) Order 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Karen Gillon be appointed to the Enterprise and Culture Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Charlie Gordon be appointed to the Public Petitions Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Charlie Gordon be appointed to replace Karen Gillon on the European and External Relations Committee.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

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

Point of Order

16:58

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My point of order is relevant to decision time. During my speech on the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill, I asked for a ruling from the Presiding Officer before we vote on the competency of the Scottish Executive's amendment, which misquotes and misrepresents the Enterprise and Culture Committee's report. The amendment states:

"the Enterprise and Culture Committee's Stage 1 report concludes that the Bill does not fulfil this purpose".

That is not the case at all. We said that the bill does not

"of itself achieve this purpose."

There is a big difference. Words matter, especially when some folk are at it. I request a ruling from you as to whether an amendment that is so factually inaccurate can be accepted as competent.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I am not going to make a ruling on who is at it, but I can certainly say that the clerks have given the matter that you raise considerable attention and study this afternoon. My ruling on the admissibility of the Executive's amendment, which you requested, is that the amendment does not contain any direct quotes from the committee's report and that, whatever differences of interpretation there may be about the committee's conclusions, there are no grounds not to admit the amendment under the admissibility criteria in the standing orders.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): There are 14 questions to be put as a result of today's business. In relation to this morning's first debate, on the Scottish economy, if the amendment in the name of Allan Wilson is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser falls. The first question is, that amendment S2M-3377.2, in the name of Allan Wilson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3377, in the name of Jim Mather, on the Scottish economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (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)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 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)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (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)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 67, Against 47, Abstentions 10.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser therefore falls, so the second question is, that motion S2M-3377, in the name of Jim Mather, on the Scottish economy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (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) (Ind)
 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)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 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)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (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)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 69, Against 22, Abstentions 33.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament accepts that it is the duty of government to help create the conditions that foster a sustainable economy, rising living standards and an improving quality of life and welcomes the commitment of the Scottish Executive to sustainable economic growth, record levels of investment in public infrastructure and transport connections, its support for competitive business, skills development, training and education, and its promotion of Scotland as a vibrant place to live, work and do business.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-3381.2, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3381, in the name of Michael Matheson, on the Scottish Olympic team, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 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 (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)

Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 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)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, 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, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 84, Against 33, Abstentions 7.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that amendment S2M-3381.1, in the name of Jamie McGrigor, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3381, in the name of Michael Matheson, on the Scottish Olympic team, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)

Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 17, Against 107, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S2M-3381, in the name of Michael Matheson, on the Scottish Olympic team, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 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 (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 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)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 92, Against 7, Abstentions 25.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament congratulates London on securing the 2012 Olympic Games, which will encourage many young Scots to become involved in sport; welcomes the Scottish bid to secure the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014; recognises that these two events would provide an unparalleled opportunity within the United Kingdom for Scots to perform at the highest level, and notes that both events would provide a major impetus to participation and performance in sport at all levels, with all the health and other benefits that brings.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that amendment S2M-3356.2, in the name of Tom McCabe, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3356, in the name of Dennis Canavan, on the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (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)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 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)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (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)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 58, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that amendment S2M-3356.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3356, in the name of Dennis Canavan, on the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)

Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 17, Against 106, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The eighth question is, that motion S2M-3356, in the name of Dennis Canavan, on the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 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)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 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)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (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)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 79, Against 31, Abstentions 14.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes that the Enterprise and Culture Committee supports the principles of the Bill; believes that St Andrew's Day should be a day of national celebration and strongly supports the Scottish Executive's commitment to achieving this objective; notes that the Enterprise and

Culture Committee's Stage 1 report concludes that the Bill does not fulfil this purpose and would not place a statutory obligation on employers to grant St Andrew's Day as part of employee holiday entitlement; seeks to uphold the consensus across the Parliament that we should only legislate where necessary and when we can give effect to that legislation; believes that there is further work to be done to develop proposals to celebrate St Andrew's Day; agrees to refer the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill back to the Enterprise and Culture Committee for a further report on the general principles, and considers that further proposals should be developed for the celebration of St Andrew's Day.

The Presiding Officer: The ninth question is, that motion S2M-3327, in the name of Margaret Curran, on the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 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 (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 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)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 89, Against 35, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the provisions in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill relating to devolved matters and those that confer executive functions on the Scottish Ministers should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The 10th question is, that motion S2M-3328, in the name of Margaret Curran, on the Civil Aviation Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the provisions in the Civil Aviation Bill, so far as they confer functions on the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The 11th question is, that motion S2M-3389, in the name of Nora Radcliffe, on membership of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's proposal to appoint Margaret Smith to be a member of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.

The Presiding Officer: Unless any member objects, I propose to put a single question on motions S2M-3373 and S2M-3374. There being no objections, the 12th question is, that motions S2M-3373 and S2M-3374, in the name of Margaret Curran, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Amendment of Specified Authorities) Order 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Treatment of Office or Body as Specified Authority) Order 2005 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: Again, unless any member objects, I propose to put a single question on motions S2M-3395 to S2M-3397, on membership of committees. There being no objections, the 13th question is, that motions S2M-3395 to S2M-3397, in the name of Margaret Curran, on membership of committees, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that Karen Gillon be appointed to the Enterprise and Culture Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Charlie Gordon be appointed to the Public Petitions Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Charlie Gordon be appointed to replace Karen Gillon on the European and External Relations Committee.

Structural Funds (South of Scotland)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-3339, in the name of Euan Robson, on the south of Scotland structural funds. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the investment in Roxburgh and Berwickshire, the Borders and the South of Scotland from European Union structural funding, such as at Springwood Park in Kelso and at Ettrick Riverside in Selkirk; notes that the current round of such funding ends in March 2006, and believes that the south of Scotland has a clear case for continuing investment to support its economy and communities.

17:14

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): In 1999, the south of Scotland was designated as a distinct region for European structural funding. A south of Scotland objective 2 programme was established with a budget of £44 million for six years. The programme commenced in April 2000 and it will close in March of next year.

The campaign to establish the distinct south of Scotland region was long in the making before 1999. Its success in that year was widely acclaimed and the benefits that flow from that programme are now manifest throughout the region.

I will give a concrete example from my constituency. Springwood park in Kelso, where the Border Union showground is located, has been transformed and is now a premier location for not only regional but national events. It has brought huge benefits to the economy of my home town and that of the wider Borders. Events ranging from the traditional agricultural show and ram sale are now complemented by a range of attractions from the world convention of Honda Gold Wing motorbikes through to major conferences and events.

The objective 2 programme has brought very significant projects such as the heart of Hawick project, the business efficiency initiative, the innovation and technology initiative, the business loan scheme, mountain biking projects, the broadband pathfinder project and many more that other members may care to record tonight.

Coupled to the structural funding is the successful re-establishment of regional selective assistance for investment in businesses, which was withdrawn in 1982. Its reintroduction was achieved partly in the wake of the Viasystems collapse in 1999 and 2000. The region has

benefited from European social fund money and it has made a major contribution towards the delivery of that distinct programme with a number of innovative projects.

The south of Scotland clearly needs to continue with the level of investment that has delivered so much to an economy that is still brittle in parts and that needs to diversify from its core of tourism, agriculture, electronics and textiles. Unfortunately, however, plans for structural funding after March 2006 suggest that little resource will be made available to the south of Scotland because of the way in which the nomenclature of territorial units for statistics—the so-called NUTS classification—stands at present. In brief, structural funds are attached to the so-called European NUTS II regions and the south of Scotland is not to be included in NUTS II as it is defined under the present objective 2 programme.

In effect, the south of Scotland is split between the south-western Scotland and eastern Scotland NUTS II regions. The fact that Dumfries and Galloway is linked to the Strathclyde urban conurbation means that its gross domestic product is 94.3 per cent of the average for European Union countries. The fact that the Borders is included with Edinburgh and the Lothians means that the GDP for that NUTS II region is 101.2 per cent of the EU average.

If we were to isolate the south of Scotland and its population of 255,000 and establish it as a NUTS II region on its own, its GDP would be 73.7 per cent of the EU average. If that were done, it would show the south of Scotland in its true light: the region is directly comparable to the Highlands and Islands, where the equivalent GDP figure is 72.4 per cent.

We need only consider the resources that are likely to go to the Highlands and Islands post March 2006 to see that the Highlands and Islands, with a per capita GDP that is almost identical to that of the south of Scotland, will qualify for perhaps 10 times as much assistance as the south of Scotland. The same may also be true of similar United Kingdom regions such as Cornwall and west Wales.

I make it clear that I welcome the funding for the Highlands and Islands and, indeed, for Cornwall and Wales. Such funding is important for those regions, but it is equally important for the south of Scotland. The Department of Trade and Industry in particular, and the Scottish Executive, need to place more emphasis on obtaining this funding. In passing, I thank Jim Wallace, the former Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, for his effort to do that.

If it was good enough to establish an objective 2 programme area that covered the south of

Scotland in 2000, it remains the case that a similar funding arrangement should be secured for the next programme period from 2007 to 2013. A lowland Scotland programme—if that is what is intended—will not do the job for the south of Scotland.

I invite the minister to give serious consideration to a renewed effort to convince the DTI to assist the south of Scotland. I fully recognise the fact that the next review of NUTS boundaries will not take place until after next March—in fact, if I understand the position correctly, it will take place in 2007. Nevertheless, we should start making the case now. If there is no will in Brussels to bring forward the review, we should make a special case for the south of Scotland to be redesignated as a separate region. After all, there are at least nine NUTS II regions across Europe with smaller populations. If the attempt to make a special case fails, both the Executive and the UK Government ought to look to fill the funding gap until such a reclassification is achieved.

My colleague Jeremy Purvis will doubtless add more details in due course. I consider the debate to be a follow-on to the debate that he sponsored some months ago in which, sadly, some Opposition members offered nothing but criticism. Be that as it may, it is now time to pull together across the south of Scotland. In that regard, I particularly welcome the report of the south of Scotland alliance entitled “Scotland’s Hidden Region”, which sets out the case for NUTS II designation and the funding that that would bring. Seemingly, the report is to be updated by the alliance. Perhaps the Executive could offer some assistance in doing so as part of a concerted effort to assist this large part of Scotland that deserves the same attention as all other parts of the nation enjoy.

17:20

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): I welcome all new entrants to the chamber, even if they have not taken the oath.

I suspect that many of us will make similar points, so I will start with a general point. EU structural funds exist to help us raise the poorest performing areas—those whose GDP most widely diverges from the EU average. I agree that, increasingly, we need to concentrate those funds on the poorest areas, which means, I am afraid, that they have to go to the new entrants to the EU. That is not just philanthropy on our part—it is to our economic benefit in the more developed countries because through helping the economies of the poorer countries they become our customers. That is one of the founding objectives of the EU and of any economic union. It is clear, though, that if we do that, there will be less jam to

spread around. We have to accept that our share will diminish.

If we are targeting poorer areas, we have to be careful that we define them properly, which is where the problems that are being discussed in this debate arise. Few areas in any country are homogeneous; most have relatively prosperous areas and poorer patches. It is clear that, with structural fund programmes, it is impossible for administrative reasons to make funding areas so small that there are no economic anomalies. Areas have to be big enough to have a sensible management programme. We all agree on that. However, the basis of the split of funds in NUTS II areas is madness. Other than the Highlands and Islands, nobody in Scotland will qualify because all the new areas are well over the GDP threshold.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Two years ago, Christine Grahame quoted Professor MacCormick with regard to the SNP’s position:

“The SNP is of the view that ... structural funds”—

post 2006—

“should be directed at funding infrastructure projects rather than by way of direct payments to foreign companies.”—
[*Official Report*, 3 September 2003; c 1336.]

I agree with the foreign companies side, but does Alasdair Morgan accept that if the future is only for infrastructure projects, the SNP’s policy rules out objective 2 funding? Can he clarify the SNP’s position?

Alasdair Morgan: I am not going to get into what the money is used for. Let us try to get the money first of all, then maybe we can argue about what it is going to be used for. In terms of SNP policy, if we had our own Government we would be talking about an entirely different and more prosperous situation.

What people in the south of Scotland find so frustrating is that if there were a south of Scotland region, GDP would, as Euan Robson said, be only marginally above that in the Highlands and Islands region and well adrift of the current figure of 94 per cent for the south-west Scotland region and the 101 per cent for the area the Borders is lumped into. The entire Highlands and Islands area, where prosperity is only marginally less than it is in the south of Scotland, can qualify for up to 10 times as much assistance as the south of Scotland.

The argument that the south of Scotland is too small to be a separate region does not wash either, because there are smaller mainland regions in Europe. The Valle d’Aosta in Italy and the Luxembourg province of Belgium are roughly the same size as the south of Scotland and qualify as NUTS II regions on their own. Why cannot the south of Scotland?

We will be told, "It cannot be done—the decisions have been made and the boundaries drawn," but at the end of the day most decisions that are made in Europe are political. What is required is the political will to ensure that the south of Scotland continues to receive structural funding. Rules have been changed—even at the last minute—when political pressure has been brought to bear. I believe that that could be done on this occasion if the United Kingdom Government had the will and if the Executive exerted enough pressure on it. That is what we are looking for.

17:25

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Euan Robson on securing the debate, which is attended by the usual suspects—except that Mary Scanlon and the minister are here as well. It is good to have the opportunity to reflect on the significance of objective 2 funding for the south of Scotland.

In Dumfries and Galloway, almost £6.5 million has been invested by the South of Scotland European Partnership since the Parliament's second session began. That is leaving aside the money that was invested before then. On top of that, we had a share of the £1.127 million for the business loan scheme, which added to the money Scottish Enterprise gave during the foot-and-mouth outbreak. Initially, it was intended to help the businesses that had been affected by foot-and-mouth, but it was retained as a loan scheme for businesses in the south of Scotland. I know of a number of businesses that have benefited from it.

In addition, £1.3 million has been invested in tourism. Originally, that was match funding for Executive money; thereafter, it was match funding for funds that Dumfries and Galloway put in. The investment was designed to help the area recover from the ravages of foot-and-mouth. More recently, £320,000 has been provided towards Dumfries and Galloway Council's proposed leisure complex, which I hope the council will get on with building. At least there has been a commitment of funding.

An allocation of £331,000 has been made for the development of conference facilities at Easterbrook Hall at the Crichton in Dumfries. That, allied to the fact that Dumfries and Galloway Council has approved a planning application following Historic Scotland's lifting of its objections, will enable us, for the first time, to have significant conference facilities in the south-west. Those facilities will be big enough to hold Scottish party conferences. I know that the Conservatives have held a smaller conference there, but I look forward to welcoming my party and members of other

parties to the new facilities once they have been built.

The north-west resource centre in Dumfries, which is not far up the road from where I live, has received nearly £900,000. That centre developed when many voluntary sector organisations came together with the council to renovate an old people's home and make it into an important facility in a slightly more deprived area of Dumfries. It makes training possible, provides employment opportunities, acts as a meeting centre and offers facilities for young people. Recently, £100,000 was given to Buccleuch Hall in Langholm. Although that is a smaller sum, it is nevertheless important in that it will allow the community in Langholm to have up-to-date facilities and to build on the significant arts experience that is available in that town through the work of local people.

In spite of the political differences between the members who represent the area, we all agree that the south of Scotland is special. It is different. It is distinct in that it has its own culture, its own traditions and a very special landscape that changes as one goes from east to west. It has its own wildlife, which includes red squirrels, golden eagles, ospreys and red kites. The area has a tremendous amount to offer.

I think I have said before in the Parliament that Pip Tabor of the Southern Uplands Partnership has suggested that the south of Scotland should be renamed the southern uplands, to reflect what the area is. It is not the southern lowlands, nor is it the south of the central belt. Unfortunately, the current NUTS boundaries seem to treat the south of Scotland as if it is the south of the central belt.

I invite the minister to comment on whether it would be possible to persuade the DTI and the EU to revise the boundaries. The suggestion that my colleague Euan Robson is making, which is that the number of NUTS areas should increase from three to four, would not in any way disadvantage Glasgow or Edinburgh; it would advantage the south of the Scotland, but it would not disadvantage anyone. In advantaging the south of Scotland, it would advantage Scotland, because more money would come into the country. I urge the minister to see whether the matter can be reconsidered.

NUTS boundaries have been redrawn in the past. For example, in 2003, changes were made in Germany, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Finland. Cannot changes be made here? Let us bring more funding into the south of Scotland—indeed, to all Scotland—to fund extremely important projects in local communities.

17:30

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): I, too, congratulate Euan Robson on securing the debate, which is about an important subject that perhaps does not get the attention it deserves. Perhaps that is reflected in the attendance. I am sure that Mary Scanlon will be delighted not to be regarded as one of the usual suspects, whatever that phrase means. However, I am delighted to join that gang.

Euan Robson made several interesting points. We must be careful not to be unnecessarily confrontational in the Parliament. We all recognise that there are peculiarities in the south of Scotland situation, whether in Dumfries and Galloway or in the Borders. We ought to work together where we can.

Parts of the south of Scotland have good links to Glasgow and other parts have strong links to Edinburgh. However, if we take away those areas, there is probably more that unites Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders than divides them. There are certainly strong and growing links between the councils that serve the region. There are also long-established family and business links. We only have to look at the history and traditions of the region to see that there are strong cultural links, which are important.

Alasdair Morgan: For the purposes of the debate, does Mr Brownlee agree that the one thing that unites Dumfries and Galloway with the Borders is low GDP compared with comparable areas in the rest of the EU?

Derek Brownlee: Absolutely. Mr Morgan has stolen my thunder on that point. I was about to say that, in addition to the obvious rural connection that areas in the south of Scotland have, a significant set of challenges faces them, from demographic change to the existence of significant pockets of deprivation.

The south of Scotland has particular issues on which we must reflect, but I do not wish to diminish the seriousness of the pockets of deprivation that exist in the central belt or the undoubted challenges that exist in the Highlands and Islands. I note that the Highlands and Islands are keeping a close watch on what is being said in this debate. However, the south of Scotland has particular problems that we should recognise. Euan Robson's description of the economy in places in the south of Scotland as brittle was good. I grew up in Selkirk and saw the impact of the textile industry contracting severely and felt the chill that went round the town when the Viasystems factory closed.

There is real economic deprivation in the south of Scotland, but one of the dangers we face is that people outwith the area perceive us to be rather

prosperous. They perhaps think of us as a commuter belt. That is true for some areas, but not for the majority of the region. It is important that we emphasise the fact that there is deprivation in the south of Scotland. Euan Robson also talked about the need for diversification. I warmly welcome those words. I agree whole-heartedly that there is a real need to diversify our economy.

Nothing associated with the EU is ever simple and it seems that structural funds are no exception. The current uncertainty over the future provision of those funds is, at the least, unsettling. The Executive has a difficult task in liaising with both the Westminster Government and the EU, but I hope that it will lobby vigorously on behalf of the south of Scotland. If the Executive does not speak out, I doubt whether the south of Scotland will be listened to. It is important that the Executive is in there fighting the corner for the south of Scotland. If it does not do so, there is a danger that we will be forgotten about in what is a large area for the European Commission or the Westminster Government to consider.

I congratulate Euan Robson on his speech. He brought light to the issue of structural funding. I look forward with interest to what the minister has to say.

17:34

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I pay tribute to Mr Brownlee for his measured and well-considered speech and his analysis of the problems that face the Borders and our constituents. I also thank my friend Euan Robson for bringing this important debate to the Parliament and for outlining so eloquently the importance of European structural funding for his and my constituents.

I was pleased that my first members' business debate after being elected to the Parliament was, as Euan Robson said, on European structural funds. That was in September 2003 and I have been concerned since then that we should lobby for the continuation of support for his and my area. I felt that that debate was important for my constituents in the Borders and for people in the south of Scotland as a whole, and it was of considerable regret to me that I was attacked for securing the debate. Mr Mundell, who was Mr Brownlee's predecessor in the Parliament, said in the Borders media that I chose to debate motherhood and apple pie. When I spoke on local radio, the interviewer asked me to respond to comments made by Ms Grahame, who had said that, instead of debating this issue,

"I should have chosen to debate a more important issue to my constituency."

However, in Mr Brownlee's spirit of welcoming a repentant sinner to the kingdom of heaven, I am pleased that all parties speaking on behalf of the south of Scotland do so with, I hope, a single voice. However, I am not naive and I expect us to have a robust debate about tactics.

Before I move on, I want to pay tribute to Douglas Scott, an officer in Scottish Borders Council. His dedication and diligence in supporting his council colleagues and others in the new ways forum in the Borders, the south of Scotland alliance and the South of Scotland European Partnership should be recognised. The partnership is an extremely well-managed programme and I hope that the minister will pay tribute to its work.

Euan Robson's motion mentions Ettrick Riverside in my constituency. I am delighted that that business centre has this week received a further boost in investment to complete the remaining floors in a former mill. That is a boost to my constituents in Selkirk and, indeed, to the wider economy in the Borders. I attended the centre's opening and I have supported it since. Incidentally, the investment was attacked vehemently by Ms Grahame—a pattern seems to be developing.

Ettrick Riverside has regenerated a former textiles mill. For many generations, textiles symbolised the economic strength of the Borders; but then, when derelict, the mill symbolised the decline of that strength. The renaissance of the building, with the partnership of Scottish Executive and European funding, is an excellent example of the benefit that structural funds can bring.

The future is not just about bricks and mortar but about people. The economic benefit of tourism in the Borders—tourism is probably our biggest hope for growing our GDP—is highly reliant on European funding. If funding is reduced, jobs in the industry could well be affected at the very time when we should be investing in the future of the tourism industry.

My position is more black and white than that of the European and External Relations Committee's report last year, which eloquently outlined the dilemma for the future in relation to competing priorities in the enlarged EU. Alasdair Morgan highlighted such issues. We in the south of Scotland should speak with a single, clear voice—as Euan Robson has done—that as a NUTS II area, the south of Scotland has its own priorities. I find it hard to agree that priorities can be established on a lowland Scotland basis that covers the entire Scottish Enterprise network.

I pay tribute to Euan Robson for securing this debate. There is considerable debate to come, but designating the south of Scotland as a NUTS II area is the right approach. I hope that all members

from the south of Scotland will be able to coalesce round that view this afternoon.

17:38

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Euan Robson on securing this debate on a very important issue. I cannot congratulate Mr Purvis on his rather selective quotations. I recall that, during the previous debate on this issue, infrastructure projects were seen as additional. One of the great needs in the Borders is the railway line, but investment is also required in the A75 in Dumfries and Galloway. Unfortunately, European funding is not available for those projects, although it would open up the economy in both areas.

I was at the Ettrick Riverside business centre today; the reclamation of the old mill site is absolutely splendid. Funding for the development of the centre included £1.5 million of European funding. There are 26 or so businesses, employing 112 full-time equivalents. That is important in the area and should be set against the backdrop of the horrors that we all recall when 1,200 jobs were lost at Viasystems and when £24 million of funding was lost, which the DTI never got back. But what is new?

A BBC Scotland office has opened up at the centre in Selkirk and new equipment has been installed. That is a broadcasting commitment to the Borders. At one point several years ago, it looked as if we might lose that commitment, so the opening of the office is very welcome.

As we all agree, European funding is extremely complex, which is why I lodged a parliamentary question on the issue to find out how much funding goes to the south of Scotland. Allan Wilson answered that question, so he no doubt knows what I am about to say. The total amount of funding from the European regional development fund since 2001—without the 2005-06 applications, which have not yet gone through the system—has been £37 million and the European social fund has contributed £10 million, which are substantial amounts.

I have connections with both areas in the south of Scotland. I have represented the Borders area and other parts of the south of Scotland since 1999, and I lived in Galloway for 15 years. From my experience, I agree with Derek Brownlee that the areas have much in common, although people may not always think so. The areas have similar problems with failing traditional industries and low wages.

I presented the answer to my parliamentary question to Douglas Scott, who has been mentioned, and asked for his comments on it. Interestingly, he said that the lack of clarity about

the future for the south of Scotland was of grave concern. He made three points. First, he said:

“The UK Government wants to nationalise European Regional Aid and the Chancellor has indicated he would replace the amount”.

However, the south of Scotland does not feel secure that the funding would come in its direction. Secondly, he said:

“If the European Union’s proposals for European Regional Policy stand, then a lot depends on the budget allocation ... If the European Commission gets what it wants, which is unlikely, then for the new funding period 2007-2013, the South of Scotland could get a maximum of £25 million”.

That is staggering when compared with the previous amount. Thirdly, he said that, if the south of Scotland funding were worked out on the same basis as that for the Highlands and Islands, we would get £200 million in that period.

Some people think that there is a forced marriage of convenience between Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders, but I have never seen the relationship in that way. When the south of Scotland alliance was formed way back in 2000, there was a strength of purpose behind it. As I said, the areas have similar problems with infrastructure and low wages. They cannot simply be lumped in with cities in the east and west, as that would distort not only the population, but the economic viability of the areas. I hope that the minister will make progress on the issue.

A petition on the matter is before the Public Petitions Committee, although it is from friends of the south of Scotland alliance and not from the alliance itself, which is a bit misleading. The petition will be considered again on 23 November, when, I trust, the committee will take account of this debate in its considerations.

17:42

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I draw members’ attention to my registered interest in a book shop in Wigtown that has received money from the Wigtown development company, which in turn has received money from the south of Scotland structural funds—the trickle-down effect from the funds works. I congratulate Euan Robson on securing this extremely important debate. It is true that the usual suspects are here, but that is because there is complete cross-party agreement on the importance of the issue and the need for the Executive to resolve the matter.

The south of Scotland is neglected in Scotland. There is an assumption at large that rural Scotland is Highland Scotland. When Scottish Natural Heritage was relocated to Inverness, the Executive described Inverness as SNH’s natural heartland, but there is a rural Scotland south of the

Highland line and it requires support. We may feel a collective guilt towards the Highlands because of the clearances, but the claims and needs of southern Scotland are equally strong and should be taken into equal consideration. The southern clearances avoided the violence of the Highland clearances, but the evidence is that more people were displaced from land in the south than were displaced in the Highlands.

While I am on the subject of history, I point out that Dumfries and Galloway was deliberately bankrupted by the original Scottish Parliament for its support for the covenanting cause. The south of Scotland continues to do badly under the Scottish Parliament, of which we see ample evidence in the relocation policy, which has been an abysmal failure for the area.

However, this is a win-win situation. We need a commitment from the Executive to enter into full and positive negotiations with the south of Scotland alliance and I hope that, in the minister’s summing up speech, he will give that commitment.

The list of what has been achieved with structural funds is immense and represents the large majority of what is bright and vibrant across the south of Scotland. It includes: the successful Borders business efficiency scheme; the rural resource centre; the Hawick regeneration initiative; the animal care training unit at Barony College; Crichton business park; youth enterprise developments throughout the regions; business loans throughout the regions; the Scottish Borders film initiative; the South West Scotland Screen Commission; the marketing of countryside access schemes; Stewartry Council of Voluntary Service; the Southern uplands partnership; music industry development; Wigtown book town, which I have mentioned; the Scottish Cashmere Club; fisheries promotion schemes; the Scottish forest industries technology centre; mountain biking centres; regeneration in Eyemouth; golf tourism; broadband; food and drink initiatives; and arts and culture initiatives. I do not believe that those initiatives would have happened without structural funds.

It is incumbent on the Parliament to find a way to secure a continuation of at least some funding from the European Union to the south of Scotland. As I said, this is a win-win situation. We very much hope that the minister will enter into full, positive dialogue with the south of Scotland alliance.

17:46

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): I, too, congratulate Euan Robson on securing an important debate; it is certainly not about motherhood and apple pie, as I will demonstrate.

The Scottish Executive recognises the important contribution that structural funds have made to economic development in the south of Scotland and we welcome that investment. For the financial period 2000-06, the south of Scotland objective 2 programme will deliver €73 million, which converts to about £50.4 million. That is given with the aim of generating sustainable economic development and is founded on the key principles of enterprise, learning and social justice.

As a number of members have said, the achievements to date have been impressive. Euan Robson mentioned the investment at Kelso and Selkirk, but a number of good examples are spread throughout the south of Scotland, such as in Elaine Murray and Alex Fergusson's constituencies, which I have had the pleasure of visiting in the past 11 months. I am pleased that those achievements are continuing now that we are getting towards the end of the current programme. There is still £9.36 million unallocated. The achievements will leave an important legacy.

The debate comes at a crucial point of change in structural funds. There is considerable uncertainty about what lies ahead. The level of future structural funds that Scotland as a whole will receive obviously depends on agreement on the overall EU budget for 2007-13. Failure to reach agreement on the budget under the previous, Luxembourg presidency has led to an inevitable delay in the negotiations. The United Kingdom presidency is now continuing efforts to reach a deal by the end of the year, possibly exploring more wide-ranging options for budget reform. However, the distinct possibility remains that negotiations could continue into 2006, given that there is now likely to be a period of reflection by all parties on the failure of the Luxembourg presidency proposition.

The uncertainty means that the range of possible funding scenarios remains significantly large and will depend on the outcome of the budget negotiations. When we strip away all the fog, it is clear that the level of funding that Scotland might receive—if any—would be much reduced from what we get currently.

Under the Commission's proposals that were outlined in 2004, the south of Scotland would be eligible for competitiveness funding. Many representatives of the south of Scotland alliance and others—including Euan Robson tonight—have campaigned for reclassification of the area as a NUTS II region, to allow it to qualify for conversion status. However, as I made clear on my most recent visit to the area and on other occasions, that will not be possible ahead of agreement on the structural fund negotiations that are under way. We have examined the option thoroughly and

it is clear that there will be no reclassification of NUTS boundaries until 2008. Even allowing for the inevitable delay, that will be well after the completion of the budget negotiations. In any event, eligibility for funding is not a means by which one would reclassify the NUTS boundaries.

Christine Grahame: With regard to the petition from the supporters of the south of Scotland alliance, I cannot recall whether the minister was one of the people to whom the Public Petitions Committee was going to write about this subject. If so, I do not suppose that he can tell us anything about his response until the group has seen it.

Allan Wilson: I do not know about the petition. I am happy to meet the petitioners to discuss the matter with them and to revisit the issue. I assure the member that, if there were ways in which we could bring political or other pressure to bear on the situation, we would do so. I understand the potential benefit to the region, although, as I said, that is not an eligibility criteria.

Jeremy Purvis: The minister's comments about NUTS II notwithstanding, does he agree that the Scottish Executive can still accept that the south of Scotland, the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway have distinct needs with regard to how moneys within Scotland are delivered?

Allan Wilson: I will come to that point later, as we are consulting on a proposal that Euan Robson referred to in his speech. Further, I am happy to discuss that issue outwith the chamber.

There is a case for continuing investment to support the south of Scotland's economy and its constituent communities. The south of Scotland faces significant challenges, as does the whole of Scotland, in relation to matters such as improving productivity and addressing social exclusion. Our key strategies, which are contained in the framework and "A Smart, Successful Scotland" outline our commitment to tackling those challenges and our future regional policy will be based on precisely those strategies.

In the changing funding environment, however, we must focus on making the best use of available resources. It is important to remember that there is a full range of domestic funding for regional economic development. Off the top of my head, I would say that around 3 per cent of total economic development spend comes from the structural funds, which means that substantially more is available in terms of regional economic development funds. The vast majority of funding for economic development in the south of Scotland and Scotland as a whole comes from domestic funding.

We have said that future programming will need to be flexible enough to meet the needs of all areas of Scotland. We are looking into the use of

spatial criteria and other options to ensure that the funding is concentrated in areas with the greatest need and is distributed equitably throughout Scotland.

It is true to say that we have proposed a programme in lowland Scotland, outwith the Highland region—a single European regional development fund programme and a single European structural fund programme. Sums to the region through the competitiveness objective will inevitably be much reduced and economies of scale will necessarily flow from that. The operation of multiple programmes would be expensive and could be overly bureaucratic. However, we are engaged in a consultation process with all our stakeholders and partners in that regard.

We should concentrate on maximising the opportunities that we are faced with. We must build on the achievements of the past and adapt to the challenges of the future.

I assure members that, whatever the future holds for structural funds, we are absolutely committed to effective regional economic development that benefits every region in Scotland, wherever those resources come from, regardless of whether they come as a consequence of the Treasury guarantee—if the United Kingdom presidency prevails—or as a consequence of conventional structural funding.

Meeting closed at 17:55.

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