



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 7 March 2017

Session 5



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Tuesday 7 March 2017

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 7 March 2017

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection, which will be led by the Rev Alastair Symington, former minister of Troon Old Parish Church and former chaplain to the Queen and convener of HM forces chaplains.

The Rev Alastair Symington (Former Minister, Troon Old Parish Church, and Former Chaplain to the Queen): Soon I reach the age of 70. Once, it was an allocation of three score years and 10, and phrases such, as, "I'm now living on borrowed time," were commonplace. It is not like that now, and if 60 is the new 40, surely 70 is the new 50.

That positive outlook does not prevent me from being irritated by press stories describing "an elderly man of 70". On the way home to Troon, there is a road sign advising motorists that elderly people are likely to be crossing, but why does it show a stooped figure? Being stooped is because of a medical condition, not because of age. If anyone tried to tell my fellow golfers at Troon, aged 60 to 80, that they are elderly and therefore must be stooped, they would get short shrift.

The people of the Old Testament had an admirable custom. As people entered or left a city through the gates, which were north, south, east and west, they would pass the elders, who sat there and offered their wisdom to the younger people. It was a mature custom and a blessing to the nation. I could not get away with advocating today that the elderly should sit at the Cowgate or Netherbow in Edinburgh and that those passing by should have to listen to them, but I am bold enough to suggest that we are not ready for the scrap heap.

Sometimes in public discussion, we talk of the future of our country. It concerns us all, whatever affiliation members have here or the public have in the community, but I would like to hear a little bit less of how the future belongs chiefly to the young. For I, too, have a future. It concerns me and my age group. We have a voice. We have a valid voice, and if we were to grasp the wisdom of Israel, the public perception might be to accept that there is a wisdom in the older members of society. No age group or gender or colour or creed can dominate another.

We have a Queen who has led us for 21 years since she turned 70. We have freedom gained under a Prime Minister who was over 70 when the last war ended. We even have Mick Jagger becoming a father again at the age of over 70. I do not want to emulate any of those people in any respect, but I have a voice, and I do have a future.

Business Motion

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-04474, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for today. I ask any member who wishes to speak against the motion to press their request-to-speak button now.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 7 March 2017—

after

followed by Topical Questions

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Information Sharing Provisions in relation to Part 4 and Part 5 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

14:03

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am taking the unusual step today of speaking against the business motion. I do so because of the importance of this afternoon's debate on international women's day. I support the Government's decision to hold a full debate to mark international women's day, and that is certainly appreciated by members across the chamber. However, as was raised in the Parliamentary Bureau meeting this morning, the Government has decided to make a ministerial statement this afternoon on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which was announced late last night. That has resulted in the debate on international women's day being delayed and cut by 20 minutes, and it will not conclude until 5.30 this evening, half an hour later than planned.

Labour did not move against the later conclusion time in the Parliamentary Bureau meeting this morning, as we wanted to ensure that the debate is not shortened further, but the irony of changing the time cannot be lost on members. What message does it send to women who have care responsibilities when our Parliament decides to delay a debate on that very issue?

Labour wants to put on record that, if the ministerial statement on the Children and Young

People (Scotland) Act 2014 had to be delivered today at all, it should have been scheduled for after the debate to mark international women's day. A Parliament that was truly committed to eradicating gender inequality would not operate in such a way.

14:05

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick): The debate that we will have this afternoon is very important; indeed, all debates that we have in the Parliament are very important. I think that it will be the first full Government debate in the Parliament on international women's day, and I am very proud to support the proposal to move decision time to 5.30 to protect the time in that debate.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S5M-04474, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. We will have a five-minute suspension to call members to the chamber for a vote.

14:06

Meeting suspended.

14:11

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and
 Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)
 (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)
 (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 79, Against 0, Abstentions 16.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 7 March 2017—

after

followed by Topical Questions

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Information Sharing Provisions in relation to Part 4 and Part 5 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is there any way under our standing orders for you to look at whether statements that would take away time from important debates should be introduced at short notice only if they are on matters of extreme urgency? [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. Let the member make her point, please.

Elaine Smith: I happen to believe that the international women's day debate, which has been brought forward for debate in the chamber in Government time for the first time—is extremely important. The cries of derision from those on the Scottish National Party seats do not do that justice. I would be grateful for your consideration of the matter, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I assure the member—and the other members present—that the very point that she raises was discussed this morning by the Parliamentary Bureau, and I am sure that it will be discussed again.

Topical Question Time

14:14

Independent Review of Transvaginal Mesh Implants

1. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the resignation of two members of the review group into the use of transvaginal mesh. (S5T-00420)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): This is a complex issue, and the review has had to consider carefully a wide range of evidence and views. I am aware of and concerned about the resignation of two of the review group's members, and I hope to meet them soon to hear their concerns directly. In addition, I plan to meet the chair of the review group separately, so that I can discuss the matter with her. I have asked that the chief medical officer attend both meetings.

I am grateful to all the group's members for their expertise and considerable efforts over the years. The independent review continues its work to produce its final report, which we expect it to publish this spring.

Neil Findlay: Elaine Holmes and Olive Mcllroy are two of the bravest and most honest women I know. Despite chronic pain and disability as a result of mesh implants, they have put their hearts and souls into the review group on the use of mesh implants, in the hope that no other woman in Scotland would experience what they and hundreds of other sufferers are going through. They wrote to the review group weeks ago to raise concerns and copied in the cabinet secretary, but they have received no reply.

Olive and Elaine resigned from the review at the weekend: first, because secret meetings, from which they were excluded, have been taking place for the past 10 months; secondly, because the draft report to which they signed up in October 2015 has been fundamentally rewritten and overturned; thirdly, because key information has been removed from the report; fourthly, because critical new evidence has been omitted; and fifthly, because there is no mention whatever of the reclassification of mesh by the European Union.

In the light of those concerns and many more, does the cabinet secretary agree that the review has been completely compromised? Does she agree with Elaine Holmes and Olive Mcllroy that the review can no longer be regarded as independent?

Shona Robison: First, I record my thanks to Olive Mcllroy and Elaine Holmes, whom I have

met on a number of occasions. They have worked very hard to raise the issue and they have achieved a great deal. For example, a patient helpline was established, due in no small part to their campaigning. In addition, the chief medical officer wrote to health boards in 2014 requesting that they suspend the procedure pending the independent review's final report, and she recently wrote to every health board to seek assurances that fully informed consent has been sought in every case in which the procedure has been carried out. That such things have come about and issues have been taken forward are down to the efforts of Olive Mcllroy and Elaine Holmes.

Neil Findlay knows that the review group and its report are independent of the Government. The group is dealing with a range of complex issues, and since its interim report was published, additional evidence and reports have been put into the public domain. I think that we all accept that the final report must take account of the additional evidence. It is therefore not surprising that some changes have been made.

That said, the issues that Neil Findlay raised, on the concerns that have been expressed and the accusations that have been made, are the very reason for my meeting Olive Mcllroy and Elaine Holmes, so that I can hear directly from them their concerns about the process.

None of us has seen the final report—I have not seen it, and I want to reserve judgment until it has been published. However, I assure Neil Findlay and other members that I will listen very carefully to the concerns that Olive Mcllroy and Elaine Holmes have raised.

Neil Findlay: I hope that, as someone who has supported the mesh women throughout the process, I will be able to come along to the meeting with the cabinet secretary when it happens.

Mesh is a global scandal. It is the subject of one of the biggest class actions in Australian history and there are more than 100,000 cases in the United States courts, with individual claims adding up to tens of millions of dollars. In Scotland, it will be the subject of the biggest-ever action against our national health service; currently, 400 cases have been lodged.

Mesh implants are permanent and difficult to remove. When they go wrong, the results are devastating. Why on earth would an independent review fail to consider all up-to-date information, irrespective of whether the research is pro-mesh or anti-mesh?

Shona Robison: None of us has seen the report, so I do not think we know whether the report has considered all that information. I am meeting Olive Mcllroy and Elaine Holmes to hear

their concerns about the issues. I will also meet the chair of the review group is so that I can address some of these issues with her, as well. I am happy to meet Neil Findlay, and indeed any other member who wishes it, to discuss the issues.

What is important is what comes from the final report, once it is published, in terms of guidance to clinicians. The chief medical officer will be a key person in that, which is why I want her to be involved in the meetings that I will have with Elaine Holmes and Olive Mcllroy, and with the chair of the review group. Where I can, I want to reassure Olive Mcllroy and Elaine Holmes that I want them to be involved in the action that will flow from the report, in addition to the action that has already been taken. I will discuss that with them when I meet them.

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): I concur with everything that Neil Findlay has said. Elaine Holmes is a constituent of mine; indeed, she was my “local hero” at the opening of Parliament last year. The campaign that she and Olive Mcllroy have led, through the Public Petitions Committee and Parliament, has been quite exemplary, in view of the tremendous pain and suffering that they have gone through and which they continue to represent on behalf of thousands of women across Scotland.

Only a few weeks ago, the First Minister gave me a categorical assurance that there would be no interference in the review and no whitewash, and yet, since the ladies’ resignation, I have been contacted by others in the review group who are astonished at the wholesale removal from the report of certain chapters.

The eyes of the world are on Scotland. We have the only Government and we are the only country that is undertaking a fundamental review of the procedure. I have to hope and believe that the report will give justice to the women concerned and that it will truly still be independent. Fundamental questions are currently being asked about whether we can have confidence that that will be the case.

Shona Robison: First, as I said in response to Neil Findlay, I absolutely recognise the efforts of Olive Mcllroy and Elaine Holmes. In my answer to Neil Findlay, I outlined some of the actions that they have already secured as a result of their campaign, and some of the assurances that the chief medical officer and I gave the committee on the back of their evidence and their campaign. Some very practical things, including the patient helpline that has been established and the chief medical officer’s letters to health boards, have come on the back of the campaign that Olive Mcllroy and Elaine Holmes have undertaken. I want to pay tribute to them.

With regard to the First Minister’s assurance, there has been absolutely no interference in the review group. I have not seen the final report. I have, of course, seen the comments and concerns that have come from Olive Mcllroy and Elaine Holmes, and I am concerned about them. That is why I have offered to meet them as soon as possible to hear in more detail and directly from them their concerns about the process.

As I said to Neil Findlay, what is important at the end of all this is that we make sure that whatever guidance is given to the NHS and clinicians is based on the most robust evidence. I am really keen—as I said to Neil Findlay—to have Olive Mcllroy and Elaine Holmes involved in taking that forward, so I will discuss that with them in more detail when I meet them.

Aberdeen Asset Management and Standard Life (Merger)

2. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what impact the proposed merger between Aberdeen Asset Management and Standard Life would have on Scotland’s economy. (S5T-00421)

The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse): Aberdeen Asset Management and Standard Life are two leading firms in Scotland’s financial services industry. We welcome the intention to grow their business in Scotland, to build on the expertise and skills of both companies and to strengthen Scotland’s global reputation for fund and asset management.

The First Minister spoke yesterday with both the chief executive officer of Aberdeen Asset Management, Martin Gilbert, and the chief executive officer of Standard Life, Keith Skeoch, to discuss the proposed merger of the companies. The new company, which will reportedly be the largest fund manager in the United Kingdom and the largest active asset manager in Europe, will be a key player in Scotland’s financial services sector and will continue to be a very important contributor to Scotland’s wider economy. I warmly welcome confirmation in the joint press release that the combined group will be headquartered in Scotland.

We will engage with both companies as the merger progresses, to discuss their plans for employment and investment in Scotland in the light of the anticipated savings that have been set out. I note that the merger is still subject to shareholder and regulatory approval, following which an integration period will begin. I have been in contact with both companies and, in the event that the plans for the merger are confirmed, the Scottish Government stands ready to support the new business and its employees to ensure that what should be a world-class investment group

has a bright future, and to help the business grow its activities in Scotland.

It is important to reflect that the announcement potentially puts the combined company in a particularly strong position to weather what continues to be a disruptive time for the asset management sector globally.

Murdo Fraser: I agree with the minister that the proposed merger is an exciting opportunity to create a Scotland-headquartered, world-leading investment house that will help to entrench Edinburgh's reputation as a financial centre. That said, the minister will be aware that there are concerns about the employment impacts of the merger. From the discussions that have been held with Aberdeen Asset Management and Standard Life, in what timescale does the minister expect there to be announcements about future workforce planning for the new entity, and when will the staff be made aware of those?

Paul Wheelhouse: I recognise the concern that there will be in such a situation, when there may be a significant change in the companies. I cannot dictate the timing that will be followed—there are shareholder and regulatory interests, and we must allow the internal processes to take place. Nevertheless, as I mentioned in my initial answer, subject to shareholder and regulatory approval, there will be an integration period that will include much more detailed work involving the workforce itself.

It is important to stress that, in discussions with Standard Life and Aberdeen Asset Management, I have been made aware that both institutions are trying to create a world-class investment group and to grow the business. I hope that that gives confidence to the workforces of both companies. We warmly welcome the confirmation that the headquarters will be in Scotland, which is obviously of great value to all of us in the chamber.

I am aware that companies such as Standard Life Investments not only have been working to reduce their cost to income ratio to record increased profitability but have increased employment. It is not necessarily the case that cost reduction leads to a loss of employment; indeed, it can be positive in terms of increased head count. Standard Life as a whole has seen growth in its assets, revenues, profit and cash held, and has also managed to increase its head count.

We remain of the view that the development could be an entirely positive one, but we await the decision of the shareholders and the regulator.

Murdo Fraser: I am sure that we all welcome the indication that the headquarters of the new entity will be based in Edinburgh. How will the

Scottish Government ensure that the economic conditions in Edinburgh are right to help secure the future of this very important new business and the many thousands of jobs that it will support?

Paul Wheelhouse: We are conscious of the need to maintain Scotland's competitiveness as a location, and we work closely with stakeholders in the financial services industry to understand their concerns and where they are looking for investment to underpin growth in the sector. In financial services, we are working on fintech, which is of particular interest to companies across the sector, and I am working with stakeholders to ensure that Scotland remains at the forefront of that development in the sector and can capitalise on those opportunities. More generally, we are working with the City of Edinburgh Council and Aberdeen City Council to ensure that we have a competitive business environment for our financial services industry.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I declare an interest, in that I worked for Standard Life in 2002 and 2003.

I was pleased to note the assurances of Martin Gilbert of Aberdeen Asset Management that there will be an emphasis on growing the new business and utilising skills within both companies following the completion of the proposed merger. What relevant discussions has the Scottish Government had over the potential for growth and for further job creation in Scotland's financial services industry, particularly here in Edinburgh?

Paul Wheelhouse: Both companies have been on record as stressing that the merger will bring together their complementary interests. In large part, they are complementary to each other.

The Scottish Government is working closely with the sector to promote Scotland as a centre of excellence in financial services, and the Financial Services Advisory Board, on which the First Minister sits alongside the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, Keith Brown, and me, is an important forum for us to engage with the industry in. We must ensure that the conditions for the industry are as good as they can be.

Scotland is internationally recognised as the most important UK financial centre outside London and the south-east, offering a breadth of services including global custody, asset servicing, banking, investment management, corporate finance, general life assurance and pensions.

We have a broad-based financial sector that is not locked into a particular aspect or subsector. The Scottish Government will continue to support the financial services industry in maintaining its real strength and adapting to change. As I said in my initial answer, I believe that the merger could potentially create a new business that is world

class and able to be resilient in the face of what can be quite challenging conditions for the financial services industry globally. Indeed, the merger will perhaps help the company to capitalise on any new opportunities that are presented by developments in areas such as fintech.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I echo Ben Macpherson's comments about the focus on jobs and growth and his welcome for the prospect of the new, merged entity. The minister is right to point out that the merger will happen in a challenging context. During a recent visit, I was told that Standard Life alone has hundreds of thousands of customers in Germany, so passporting rights and maintaining access to those customers in Europe is vitally important. Can the minister describe the representations that the Scottish Government has made to both the United Kingdom Government and the European Commission about maintaining full passporting rights, which those retail customers require, over and above simple equivalence arrangements?

Paul Wheelhouse: My colleague Michael Russell has taken forward the recognition of the important issue of passporting in his discussions with UK ministers around the implications of Brexit for the financial services industry. It is worth stressing that 26 per cent of employment in Edinburgh, part of which Mr Johnson represents, is in the financial services industry. I am therefore sure that the industry will be of great import to Mr Johnson—and to Mr Macpherson and other members who represent Edinburgh.

The financial services sector is clearly important to Scotland as a whole, and its direct contribution to our economy cannot be overstated. Now that the UK Government has made clear its intent to leave the single market, we believe that it is essential that it sets out exactly how it intends to protect the financial services industry and, indeed, Scotland in the forthcoming negotiations. The Scottish Government will explore differential options for Scotland, as I am sure that the member knows. The Scottish Government is considering all possible steps to ensure Scotland's continued relationship with the European Union, including seeking an agreement that will ensure that Scotland retains single market membership, even if the rest of the UK leaves.

However, we are keen to engage with UK ministers to ensure that they understand the importance of financial services to Scotland. I have met Lord Price in my own context to stress the sector's importance, and I will continue to do so.

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Information-sharing Provisions)

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Our next item of business is a statement by John Swinney on information-sharing provisions in relation to parts 4 and 5 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement.

14:32

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Improving the lives of all our children, young people and their families is something that members of the Scottish Parliament have been working together to achieve for many years. Getting it right for every child has been the national approach in Scotland since 2006 to improving outcomes and supporting the wellbeing of our children and young people. Its core premise of offering the right help at the right time from the right people was supported by all parties then, and I believe that they still support that. This Government remains wholly committed to applying the GIRFEC approach as part of our determination to ensure that all Scotland's children get the best possible start in life.

The foundations on which GIRFEC is built are the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Above all, this approach seeks to ensure that public policy and practice decisions are taken in the best interests of the child and deliver the Government's responsibility to protect and support families to nurture their children. The named person service is central to fulfilling the responsibility of the Government and the wider public sector to enhance and support children's rights.

The named person service is a simple but important concept that came from families themselves: that having a single, named contact such as a health visitor or teacher whom parents know they can go to for advice, information and support about any aspect of their child's wellbeing is helpful for children and parents. For practitioners, having that same clear point of contact at the core of a team of professionals and services around a child enables agencies and individuals to work more effectively together to better support, safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children and young people.

The named person service makes available access to early support for all families because, although it can be clear in some circumstances that help might be required, it is impossible in all cases to predict whether or when a family or a

child might need extra help. Whether families are faced with the difficulties posed by the debilitating cycle of deprivation, an unexpected diagnosis of a disability, a breakdown of family relationships or other challenges when circumstances change, clearly there are times when children, young people and their families benefit from a clear point of contact for information and support to help them to navigate the system and to get the help that they need. As I made clear in my statement to Parliament in September, the Government remains absolutely committed to the named person service as a way to support children and their families.

On 28 July last year, the Supreme Court ruled definitively that the intention of providing a named person for every child to promote and safeguard their wellbeing was

“unquestionably legitimate and benign”.

The judgment did not require current policy to change and did not relate to current practice under getting it right for every child. A local authority or health board can continue to nominate a person to be responsible for the provision of services to a child, and organisations can, within the framework of the existing law, continue to deliver or engage with such existing or developing named person services.

I reiterate my support for the practitioners across Scotland who continue to live up to their commitment to develop and deliver a named person service to families in their local areas within the framework of the existing law.

However, the Supreme Court judgment requires us to change the statutory provisions relating to one aspect of the named person service, which is information sharing. I believe that the aims of the policy justify broad support and that when the way forward on the implementation of information sharing is accurately understood, it too will command support.

The Supreme Court determined that ministers needed to provide greater clarity on the basis on which health visitors, teachers and other professionals who support families will share and receive information in their named person role. It ruled that the information-sharing provisions of part 4 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 as they were originally framed are incompatible with article 8 of the European convention on human rights and that changes are needed to make them compatible with article 8 and to ensure respect for a person's

“private and family life, his home and his correspondence.”

The Supreme Court judgment has provided an opportunity, therefore, to revisit the information-sharing provisions in the 2014 act in a way that will

not only secure the protection of those rights but improve the named person service and reassure parents, practitioners and the wider public that the service will work with and for families.

Since the Supreme Court judgment, I have led a three-month period of intense engagement. I have listened to parents, charities, practitioners and children and young people, and I have listened to those who support the named person policy and those who have concerns about it. Over three months, that engagement involved more than 50 meetings and some 250 organisations and groups. It included about 700 young people; parents and carers; practitioners; professionals; and leaders from education, health, local authorities, police, faith communities, unions and charities. Importantly, we listened to those who had concerns about information sharing and were prepared to consider a revised way forward. We reached out to others including Christian Action Research and Education Scotland, CLAN Childlaw, Together and the Scottish Parent Teacher Council. We are grateful to all those who took part in what was a genuinely open engagement.

A key part of our engagement was listening to children and young people. Our commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requires us to uphold children's rights by ensuring that their voices are heard, listened to and acted on by all those who support them and provide services to help them. On a more personal level, young people recognised the benefit of having access to someone they trust to help them to get support if needed.

The Government listened to parents. The named person service provides a point of contact and support who works in partnership with parents and families to help them to navigate the wider system. Parents told us that they do not always get the support that their family needs so they have to tell their stories over and over again. Parents also told us that they want the named person service to work in partnership with them and that having a say in the sharing of information about their family matters to them. Their views and their experience reinforce the initial rationale for creating the named person service.

The Government listened to practitioners. Like families, nursing and medical professional organisations and trade unions told us that information sharing that is rooted in consent, engagement and the empowerment of families is the best way forward. Only in exceptional circumstances, such as where the risk of harm is present, should we consider departing from those core principles. Practitioners highlighted the point that professional judgment and discretion remain vital in working with families to decide whether,

when and with whom information should be shared.

The Care Inspectorate highlighted to us that sharing of relevant and proportionate information in relation to the wellbeing of children had improved as organisations prepared for the implementation of the named person service. Joint inspections of services for children and young people in 2014 to 2016 showed that most community partnership areas had developed mechanisms for sharing information about individual children with relevant services, while working within the requirements of data protection legislation and duties of confidentiality. However, their reports also showed that practice remains inconsistent across services in localities and between localities, meaning that families will experience differing levels of support. A recurring issue in tragic cases has been a failure to share information when remedial action could have been effective.

Putting the findings from that extensive engagement and the Care Inspectorate reports alongside the ruling of the Supreme Court makes it clear what needs to be remedied. We must provide consistency, coherence and confidence in the approach to sharing information below the threshold of risk of significant harm, where the named person's role is so important in supporting families to get assistance when they need it.

I propose to bring forward a bill that will include new provisions on when and how information can be shared by and with the named person service. The new provisions will ensure that we address the Supreme Court's judgment, live up to our objective of supporting children and young people and give them and their families reassurance that their rights are fully respected. I intend to introduce the bill ahead of the summer recess, and I will work with Parliament to agree a timetable to enable commencement in 2018.

Without legislation, there is a risk that the benefits of a coherent and consistent approach, which in some places is delivered through good practice, are not made available to all families. The new provisions mean a longer timeframe for commencement than was originally anticipated, but I believe that, given the significance of the issues involved, Parliament must be given the full and proper opportunity to legislate on these issues.

This approach will involve replacing some of the provisions in the 2014 act that the Supreme Court was concerned about with new provisions that require named person service providers, and others involved with children and young people, to consider whether sharing information will promote, support or safeguard the wellbeing of the child or young person and is compatible with data

protection law, human rights and the law of confidentiality. Only if information can be consistently shared within those legal constraints will the power be there to share it—the legislation will make that clear.

That approach aims to promote good and consistent practice by imposing an explicit duty on named person service providers and others to consider whether or not to share information where that would promote, support or safeguard the wellbeing of a child, while making it clear that that may be done only where there is compatibility with data protection law, the law of confidentiality and human rights law. Through both practice and the legislative framework, the importance of involving families in the sharing of their personal information will be central to how the named person service works with families.

There is also a crucial balance to be struck. We must ensure that the 2014 act supports children, young people and families to access support easily if they need it, but we must also strive to ensure that the amendments to the 2014 act do not result in unnecessary bureaucracy or a burden on services. I have reflected on that point very carefully.

To support implementation of that approach, it is proposed that a new section be added to the 2014 act to provide for the making of guidance, specifically on information sharing, designed to address the Supreme Court's judgment. That guidance will be an important resource that will assist practitioners to take a systematic approach to information sharing in appropriate cases. It is envisaged that the guidance could incorporate suitable case studies to assist understanding by practitioners, and it will also help to address the concerns expressed in the Supreme Court judgment about the question of proportionality. That approach supports the ambitions, which practitioners share, to enable continued improvements in working together, while leaving appropriate scope for practitioner judgement and discretion.

I intend that draft guidance will be presented to Parliament as early as possible during the bill's passage. I am aiming for a draft to be available at the same time as the bill is introduced, ahead of summer recess.

The Government will work with practitioners and organisations to enable them to implement the new legislation. We will work with key partners to develop and deliver national training and capability-building programmes to ensure that proportionate information sharing that works for and with families is the norm. We will engage key partners in the inspectorates and the statutory, third and independent sectors to develop

resources for robust self-evaluation and review mechanisms for use by practitioners.

I recognise that, after a campaign that has involved a lot of misinformation about the named person service, it is important for Parliament and the country to have confidence in the getting it right for every child approach. Ensuring the trust of families and young people across Scotland is critical in ensuring the success of the named person service. The legislative process will create the opportunity to do that. In addition, we will deliver, with partners, public information campaigns that provide accessible information for children, young people and parents on their rights and entitlements, as embodied in getting it right for every child.

I want to reassure Parliament that we have taken seriously our responsibility to provide an appropriate response to the Supreme Court judgment. We have sought advice and listened to a wide range of views and experiences. We now intend to put in place measures so that the named person service, the aims of which were supported by Parliament and described by the Supreme Court as “unquestionably legitimate and benign”, is compatible with data protection law, human rights and the law of confidentiality. By making these changes, we will respond to the Supreme Court ruling in a way that improves the named person service and which gives families, practitioners and the wider public greater confidence that information sharing for the purposes of the named person service will be in line with the founding principles of getting it right for every child and will respect people’s rights fully.

The approach that I have set out today seeks to bring consistency, clarity and coherence to the practice of sharing information about children and young people’s wellbeing across Scotland. It also seeks to achieve something more fundamental: to enable us to work together, as Government and Parliament, to deliver the original aims of a policy journey that began more than 10 years ago. Let us agree today to ensure that we get it right for every child.

The Presiding Officer: Members now have the opportunity to put questions to the cabinet secretary.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of his statement.

Every opinion poll that has been conducted on the named person policy shows that the majority of the public and a very large number of the practitioners whom the cabinet secretary mentioned in his statement do not want named persons. On the basis of what evidence has the

cabinet secretary decided not to abolish the whole idea?

The cabinet secretary mentioned that the Supreme Court said that the named person policy intervention was “unquestionably legitimate and benign”. However, to be precise, there is a very significant difference between a policy of caring for wellbeing with benign intentions, and a named person policy that has at its heart potentially disproportionate and intrusive data sharing, which was ruled unlawful. Does the cabinet secretary accept that key difference, which he did not recognise in his statement? Will “wellbeing” be defined in the new bill? Does the cabinet secretary recognise that the most recent statistics tell us that the vacancy rate among health visitors, who are key deliverers of the policy, is rising, as is their age profile? Is that not a real problem for the policy’s implementation?

John Swinney: On the question of the policy intention, the Government was elected on its policy commitments, and it is committed to the named person service. Parliament has legislated for that to be the case and, until such time as Parliament legislates not to have a named person service, I am duty bound as a minister to respect the view and the wishes of Parliament. I do not think that Parliament would expect anything else of me.

Liz Smith’s second question was on the Supreme Court’s judgment that the named person policy is “unquestionably legitimate and benign”. Liz Smith is correct to say that the Supreme Court raised issues about proportionality and, in my statement, I went to great lengths to set out how the question of proportionality will be addressed. It will be addressed by placing a duty on practitioners to consider whether there is a legitimate case for sharing information and to go on to consider whether the sharing of that information is compatible with the existing legal framework in which we all have to operate. I have no alternative but to address all issues that are raised by the Supreme Court, and the question of proportionality has been addressed in that fashion.

Thirdly, Liz Smith will be aware that the term “wellbeing” is present and defined in the 2014 act. Parliament will have to consider the legislation that I introduce.

Lastly, Liz Smith might not have got to this detail yet but, this morning, data revealed an increase of 117 in the number of health visitors, which is welcome progress towards our target of 500 by 2018. We need to ensure that we have a strong health visitor community that is able to contribute to supporting families where they need support to assure the wellbeing of young people. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport and I are very focused on ensuring that we have a seamless

integrated support arrangement in place for those in our society who need it, so that we ensure that we can, at the earliest possible opportunity, act to overcome the difficulties and the challenges that children face.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Towards the end of his statement, the Deputy First Minister talked about misinformation about the named person service, and he acknowledged the consequent loss of trust in the policy among parents and practitioners. He knows that we have long argued that one of the elements of the named person scheme that allows some misrepresentations to gain credence is the inclusion of 16 and 17-year-olds. Will he consider using the legislative process on which he is now embarked to remove 16 and 17-year-olds from the scope of the legislation to help to re-establish the credibility of the policy?

John Swinney: I am grateful to Mr Gray for his remarks, and I am obviously familiar with his long-expressed view on the question of 16 and 17-year-olds. When I came to Parliament in September, I set out for Mr Gray the origin of the thinking behind the inclusion of 16 and 17-year-olds, which is that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as a young person up to the age of 18. The Government is trying, in a variety of ways, to fulfil our obligations in relation to the UNCRC. For example, a few weeks ago the Minister for Childcare and Early Years set out information on the steps that the Government is taking in a different area of policy—the minimum age of criminal responsibility. The issue that Mr Gray raised is not an easy one for us to resolve against the backdrop of that policy framework.

In September, I also rehearsed for Mr Gray the fact that a sizeable proportion of calls from vulnerable young people to our helplines and to ChildLine are from 16 and 17-year-olds. There is an important and illustrative lesson for us in that.

The removal of 16 and 17-year-olds from the named person legislation does not form part of my current proposals, but Parliament will embark on a legislative process and it will be up to Parliament to consider such questions.

The Presiding Officer: From now on, I would like to have very brief questions and equally succinct answers.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): It might be worth reminding members that the named person service has the backing of Parliament, local authorities and the major child welfare organisations.

Will the cabinet secretary detail how he will consult on the bill and how he will ensure that the

Education and Skills Committee is kept updated on any progress?

John Swinney: I have gone through an intensive programme of discussion and dialogue to get to where I am today. The formal consultation on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill and the issue of a named person service took place back in 2012. The new bill will be subject to scrutiny by the Education and Skills Committee, and the Government will comply fully with the timetable that the committee agrees with the parliamentary authorities to ensure full scrutiny of all its provisions.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): Under the Deputy First Minister's amendments, will named persons be able to share information about children without their consent or without the consent of their parents only when it is necessary to safeguard the child's welfare? Any broader power is likely to continue to be in breach of the law.

John Swinney: Let me say two things to Mr Tomkins. First, I envisage that information will be shared with consent in all but the exceptional circumstances that are provided for by the Data Protection Act 1998, human rights law and the law of confidentiality. Any exceptional circumstance would have to be enabled for information to be shared without consent, as long as it is provided for in those legislative instruments and that legislative framework that I have set out.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Given the many scare stories that we have heard about the named person service, which was a concept that came from families, how will the cabinet secretary ensure that the general public understand how it will work?

John Swinney: The first thing to do is to address the issues that have given rise to significant concern. As I have looked through those issues, it is quite clearly information sharing, and perhaps some of the points that Mr Tomkins has just raised, that have caused that concern. The answer that the Government has come up with today is strong and robust and it will enable us to proceed with an approach that addresses the concerns and allows us to focus back on the core principle behind the named person service, which is to provide a dependable and reliable point of contact for individual children and families when they require support in our society.

When we strip away all the debate that has gone on about this, that is what the named person is about: providing a reliable contact point for families and children so that they can go to it when they need help. In our experience from the consultation exercise, that is the service that the

public are looking for and, on that basis, I think that we can build public confidence in it.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

The challenges that have been faced by the named person policy to date are twofold. The first is the legal issue, as identified by the Supreme Court, and the second is the issue around the trust of professionals, teachers and children. What activities that took place within the period of intensive engagement specifically addressed the issue of trust? How does the cabinet secretary understand the issues around trust that the policy faces? What actions will be taken to address the issues of trust in the named person service before, during and after the implementation of the revised policy?

John Swinney: The formulation that Mr Johnson has expressed there is helpful. There are legal issues that must be addressed before the service can be implemented in terms of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. We have to address those issues and I have set out to Parliament the mechanism by which we will do that, which is the highest level of authority that the Government can put in place—we ask Parliament to legislate on the question. We can ask Parliament to make no greater contribution than that. The first and very important point, therefore, is that I recognise that legislation is required. In a sense, that leads me into the second point, which is about building trust. If I am asking Parliament to legislate again on these key issues, I am recognising the need to ensure that parliamentary authority is given to the provisions, and I hope that that will assist in creating some public trust.

The second point on that links with the point that Rona Mackay raised with me. The named person service should be explained to people, not as a service that will be intrusive to family life—as a consequence of the legal issues that I am now going to address, we hope to address that point conclusively—but as a resource that is of benefit and assistance as a contact point for families, to make sure that they can get support when they feel that they need it.

The last point that I would make to Mr Johnson is about practitioners, which covers a wide variety of different professionals. In my experience of the public services, many of our public servants, as teachers, health visitors, care workers, or whatever function that they are exercising, are very keenly motivated by the wellbeing of the individuals for whom they are offering support or providing education.

That is a key connection that enables the policy to be successful, because it links the needs of individuals directly with what can be delivered by public servants. We all see public servants who

make a phenomenal contribution to our society and we have the opportunity to ensure that members of the public have access to that quality of service.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I remind members that I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the cabinet secretary.

How will the sharing provisions in the 2014 act impact on classroom teachers?

John Swinney: There is a requirement for classroom teachers to be fully cognisant of the role of a named person and the issues that can be raised with a named person, through the appropriate training and support that are available to them, to ensure that the role is being used to the full.

Classroom teachers have a particular role to ensure that they support the young people in their care, working within the structures of our education system to make sure that any concerns that they have about the wellbeing of young people are properly addressed in the appropriate fashion, while respecting the legal rights of individuals in that process.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): As colleagues have done, I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement.

I am reassured by Mr Swinney's answer to Daniel Johnson with regard to the Government's consultation period over recent months. Ensuring that young people in particular are engaged in GIRFEC is essential.

What will the Scottish Government do to ensure that young people are engaged in both the legislative process and the drafting of new guidance, through organisations such as the Scottish Youth Parliament that they have directly elected?

John Swinney: I am keen to make sure that we use the process to build confidence in the whole approach. I will take a very open approach to inviting contributions and input from organisations to help us to design the legislation and the guidance that goes with it. The guidance is very important: we must ensure that it provides the necessary clarity for individuals. Having the guidance informed by children and young people would be particularly beneficial.

On the question of dialogue with young people, the Cabinet met a group of representatives from the Scottish Children's Parliament and the Scottish Youth Parliament for what the First Minister committed to being the first of annual discussions on relevant issues of mutual interest. Members of the Cabinet got a tremendous amount out of that conversation and we will continue that dialogue.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement and his recognition of the importance of legislation in allowing for the parliamentary scrutiny that I suspect that others were hinting at. Does he recognise that the scope of the original legislation was seen to be exceeded by the implementation of the named person policy proposals, and that therefore parental concern is significant and has still to be addressed adequately?

Will the explicit duty that the cabinet secretary outlined to Parliament this afternoon guard against the invasion of parental and family privacy that is of such concern, and is he minded to note that that balance is likely to be tested only in court?

Given the concerns on this matter, does the cabinet secretary recognise the danger of a breakdown between the police, teachers and health workers on one hand and parents on the other? What will he do specifically to address that point?

John Swinney: On Mr Scott's last point, my whole intention is to create an atmosphere of partnership working between public authorities, public servants and families. The whole intention behind the named person approach is to make public services much more accessible and readily contactable by individual families. At the heart of the concept is the encouragement of that process.

Anyone who looks at my statement will, I hope, come to the conclusion that I have recognised the importance of clarifying the issue of consent around the sharing of information. My answer to Mr Tomkins was that information will be shared with consent in all but the exceptional circumstances that I outlined. I hope that that goes a long way to addressing the issues that underpin Mr Scott's question.

In my statement, I looked very directly at the issues that were raised by the Supreme Court and, I believe, addressed them directly and adequately by recognising that if information is to be shared, consideration will have to be given to whether the legal authority enables that to happen. If that is done, it will protect the rights that Mr Scott legitimately raises with me.

The framework that has been put in place is designed to provide that absolute clarity around the sharing of information to protect those very rights that are at the heart of Mr Scott's question and which—frankly—underpin the Supreme Court judgment that I have to address.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): Will there be any additional resources for named person service providers to support the implementation of these changes?

John Swinney: The Government has already made resources available for the implementation of the changes. We made that allocation to local authorities during 2016-17. Obviously, we will look at the specific issues in relation to raising awareness on these questions to ensure that practitioners are fully supported in the important work that they have to do in that respect.

Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests as a serving councillor on Aberdeen City Council. Is the cabinet secretary aware of the survey responses that were provided by a sample of heads of senior school guidance in 29 Highland schools, which were shared with Bill Alexander, and which make plain the extent of the concern among practitioners about the named person policy? Seventy per cent of respondents strongly agreed that the named person policy has caused them greater stress, and more than 80 per cent—more than four out of five—are concerned about the impact of the named person legislation. Further, last year, Aberdeen City Council leader Jenny Laing stated that the named person policy was putting people off taking up positions as primary school headteachers in Aberdeen.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that, with all that evidence, the issue is naturally a matter of great concern to parents and teachers—in particular, when he says today that their trust is crucial to the future of the named person policy?

John Swinney: The point that I find difficult to understand and which underpins Mr Thomson's question is that somehow members of the teaching profession are not focused on or concerned about the wellbeing of the children whom they educate. That is what the named person concept is about and that is what members of the teaching profession do every single minute of the day—they consider the wellbeing of children and support them to fulfil their potential. I am keen that the named person proposal is explained to people on that basis.

If I was a teacher who heard the explanation of the named person proposal that has been communicated quite extensively in the media, I think that I might have some concerns about it. Mr Thomson has fuelled much of that concern during the process. [*Interruption.*]

I am interested in making sure that we work with practitioners, parents and families to ensure that we have in place points of contact that are reliable assets for families in addressing issues on which they might need support from our public services, in the years to come.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I want to pick up on the legitimate question that Clare Haughey asked about resources. It will not

have escaped Parliament's attention that the front page of today's *Herald* states quite clearly that more than £1 billion has been cut from local government funding in the past five years. We need a more fulsome response from the cabinet secretary on the question whether there are sufficient resources. Given the cuts in local government funding, what can he say to assure us that the policy will work?

John Swinney: I point out to Monica Lennon that the most recent available data on local authority spend shows an increase in resources that have been allocated to education and children's services.

The second point that I will make is that the Government has already made an allocation to local authorities for implementation of the named person policy; the money has been allocated in this financial year. Clearly, the policy has not been introduced, as was originally conceived by the legislation, so local authorities still have that money. I have not reclaimed it—it is sitting with local authorities and can be used to support them in their activities.

I will come back to the point that I made to Liz Smith. The data that we saw this morning showed an increase of 177 health visitors, which means that we are well on the way to achieving an increase of 500 by 2018.

I point out to Monica Lennon that there has been an increase in the spending power of local authorities as a consequence of the Government's budget decisions and the decisions that were taken by this Parliament in agreeing the budget provisions.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for his detailed statement. Interested parties will welcome any information that the cabinet secretary can provide on checks and balances in relation to the named person service. Can he offer any assurances in that regard?

John Swinney: There are, of course, provisions within the existing legislation for raising concerns about the operation of the named person system, and there is a complaints mechanism that exists in respect of the workings of the system. Individuals who are concerned about how the system operates will have every opportunity to raise those concerns openly and have them addressed.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): The cabinet secretary said that he has met 250 organisations and groups and has had 50 meetings over the past three months. My understanding is that he has still not met the "No to the named person" campaign, which brought a case to the Supreme Court. Which organisations has he met that are against his proposals? Will he meet people from

that campaign so that they can discuss their concerns with him?

John Swinney: I explained my position on the matter to the Education and Skills Committee when I was before it some months ago.

I have been focused on addressing the issues arising from the Supreme Court judgment in order to ensure that the named person policy can be put into practice. That is what Parliament has legislated for, and that is what I consider to be my duty, as a cabinet secretary, to be. I know that Mr Balfour does not agree with the policy and that the Conservatives want the service to be abolished. However, that is not the position of Parliament; I am accountable to Parliament and my democratic duty is to ensure that I address the issues that have been raised by the Supreme Court process.

I have not met anyone from the "No to the named person" campaign because—there is a clue in the name—those people do not want the named person service. They do not want to engage in a discussion with me about how the policy could be put into practice; they want to end it.

I have discussed with organisations such as CLAN Childlaw, which was a party to the legal action, issues that they are concerned about, in order to try to address those issues adequately. Obviously, those organisations will speak for themselves and will make clear their views about the steps that I have taken. CLAN Childlaw, the charity Together, the Scottish Parent Teacher Council and CARE Scotland expressed concerns about the policy, so we have engaged with them to try to address those concerns.

I have taken as open an approach as possible. However, I think that Parliament will understand that, because I am interested in implementing the named person service and finding a way to do so, it would be unusual were I to meet people who do not want it to be implemented.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary accept that there are many vulnerable children and families in my constituency who really need a named person and the help and support that such a person can give? Will he reassure them and me that he will hold firm to his principles in providing the service?

John Swinney: I recognise the need that exists in Mr Mason's constituency, but that will be the position in every constituency in the country. There are particular challenges in his constituency, but I can think of families in my constituency that would also benefit from such support.

Therefore, I assure him that I will hold firm in my view. I have come back to Parliament, having

taken time to consider the difficult and complex issues that are involved in the process, to ensure that Parliament can consider the legislation and apply the highest test that it can deploy to ensure that we have in place measures that can turn into practical support for the people and families whom Mr Mason represents.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): If the cabinet secretary is determined to reintroduce the named person provisions in such a relatively short timescale, will he assure Parliament that the proposed bill's policy intentions will be fully developed and clearly expressed in the bill to give Parliament every opportunity to debate them and make good law that complies with the European convention on human rights?

John Swinney: Parliament has already legislated in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 on many aspects of the provisions. The only provisions on which the Supreme Court expressed concern were on information sharing. I have set out to Parliament the route by which I intend to address those concerns. I have done that to the highest standard that Parliament can expect on any question by asking Parliament to legislate again. Obviously, Parliament will have to be satisfied with the timescale that is available to consider the legislation. As Mr Scott knows, the Government does not have a majority, so there will have to be agreement with committees and other parties about timescales to ensure that due and proper consideration is given to the legislation.

Criticism is often levelled at ministers who take appropriate and adequate time to consider issues. I have been criticised for taking as long as I have taken to consider the issue, but I make no apology for it. To fulfil my commitments as a cabinet secretary, I want to come to Parliament with good, strong and well-considered legislation that can address serious issues that the Supreme Court raised. Parliament would expect nothing else of me.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement and questions.

International Women's Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-04440, in the name of Angela Constance, on international women's day.

15:18

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): It is a stark fact that, in 2017, women nowhere in the world can claim to have the same rights and opportunities as men. No country has eradicated violence against women and girls, eliminated pay inequality or erased discrimination and prejudice.

According to the World Economic Forum, the gender gap will not close until 2186, which is 169 years from now. That is a deeply pessimistic forecast but we should not allow it to become a foregone conclusion. The theme for this year's international women's day is "Women in the Changing World of Work: planet 50/50 by 2030". We will, of course, celebrate success and progress, but we will also look ahead with steely determination to the journey that we have yet to travel. Given that women have waited long enough for true equality, I am sure that members will agree that 2030 is somewhat more palatable than 2186.

Today, Parliament has the opportunity to unite to reaffirm our collective commitment to protecting, upholding and advancing the rights of women, and to say, as Hillary Clinton did,

"Human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights".

Today, we will acknowledge and appraise progress made in Scotland, and we will reflect on the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead; most of all, I hope that we will all increase our resolve to act on advancing women's equality both at home and abroad. It is in that vein that I lead this debate and speak to the motion in my name.

Given the theme of women in the changing world of work, it is apt to reflect that international women's day has its origins in one of the first organised actions by working women anywhere in the world. On 8 March 1857, hundreds of women workers in garment and textile factories in New York staged a strike against low wages, long working hours and inhumane working conditions. Their struggle has been replicated across the years and around the globe.

Fast forward to 8 March 2017, and tomorrow—in New York and Washington DC, and in 35 countries in total—will see the "day without a woman" marches, with some women withdrawing

their paid and unpaid labour. I am reminded of a quotation by Gloria Steinem:

“No man can call himself liberal, or radical, or even a conservative advocate of fair play, if his work depends in any way on the unpaid or underpaid labor of women at home, or in the office.”

At the roots of that mobilisation is the international movement of women’s marches, combining struggles against male violence, opposition to the casualisation of the labour market and wage inequality, and campaigning against homophobia, transphobia and xenophobic immigration policies. As well as looking at paid and unpaid work by women, we must not consider women’s economic disadvantage in isolation from the broader social injustice that can be associated with class, race, disability, sexuality and gender-based violence.

Our work to support women to take their rightful place in the economy co-exists with the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan”, the disability delivery plan, the race equality framework, and “Equally Safe: Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls”, as well as three-year funding for voluntary organisations, supported through the £20 million equality budget.

We need to ensure that our work is informed by the best expertise available and tackles the systemic issues that women and girls face, such as gender stereotyping, violence against women and occupational segregation. That is why the First Minister is establishing an advisory council on women and girls, with Louise Macdonald of Young Scot as its chair. The advisory council will bring together champions for the rights and advancement of women and girls. I know that Louise Macdonald and other council members will be fantastic advocates for women, and I look forward to working with them.

I want to reflect on women’s experience in the workplace and in the labour market. The gap between male and female employment rates in Scotland is 5.5 percentage points, whereas across the United Kingdom as a whole it is 9.3 percentage points. In comparison with the UK, Scotland has a higher female employment rate but, more interestingly, Scotland has the sixth-highest female employment rate across the 28 European Union countries. If we cast our eyes across the EU, we see that Scotland has the second-lowest female unemployment rate, at 4.7 per cent, behind Germany at 3.7 per cent.

Of course, it is not just the number of women in work that is important. We must always be prepared to look beneath the headline figures to see and understand the true picture. That is particularly pertinent when it comes to the pay gap. The long-term trends in relation to the gender pay gap are positive. The full-time pay gap has

fallen from 16.7 per cent in 1999 to 6.2 per cent in 2015, and the overall pay gap, which includes part-time as well as full-time work, has fallen from 24.6 per cent in 1999 to 15.6 per cent in 2016. However, the fact that we still have a pay gap is utterly unacceptable.

Members will be aware that the Scottish Government has lowered the threshold for listed public authorities to publish their gender pay gap and equal pay statements, from those with more than 150 employees to those with more than 20 employees. The pay gap is driven in part by occupational segregation and gender stereotyping. That underlines the importance of the consultation on the science, technology, engineering and mathematics education and training strategy, which is led by the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science.

As a Government, we are committed to continuing to challenge the drivers of the gender pay gap. We recognise that the gap widens with age and that it is felt most by women over 40. The number of older people who choose to work continues to increase. Last year, we conducted research on pensioner employment, and we are currently completing a second stage of research with over-50s on a range of employment concerns. That research will be published in May this year.

Policies and actions that support women who are over 40 in the workplace include our commitment to deliver returner to work programmes, support for the real living wage, and the promotion of flexible working. We also support family-friendly working Scotland, which is a partnership between the Scottish Government and various third sector organisations. A key principle of all that work is the recognition of the importance of enabling women to play a full part in the economy, as addressing the gender pay gap is about both equality and economic necessity.

As we know, the gender pay gap is especially prevalent after pregnancy, and discrimination is still experienced too often by new and expectant mothers. In 2015, the Equality and Human Rights Commission reported that 54,000 women across the UK had been dismissed or made compulsorily redundant or felt that they had to leave their jobs when they were pregnant or on maternity leave. Again, that is utterly unacceptable. The Minister for Employability and Training responded by establishing the pregnancy and maternity working group, which he chairs. The group, whose second meeting took place earlier today, has been tasked with improving access to advice for both employees and employers and creating new guidelines for employers.

The next hurdle that new mothers often face is accessing high-quality and affordable childcare. Our plan to nearly double free early learning and

childcare entitlement for all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds by 2020 remains our single most transformative infrastructure project.

Both the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the EU have stressed the importance of childcare in removing barriers for women who wish to work. We know that women typically spend disproportionately more time on unpaid care work. Society still tends to view caring for children or elderly relatives as women's work—that cuts across all countries, classes and cultures. Fifty-nine per cent of carers are women, and women of working age are far more likely to be carers than men. That creates a double burden of work for women.

Later this year, we will publish the gender index. As part of that work, we will begin to bring together evidence on the significant economic contribution that women make to the economy as a result of unpaid caring work.

We want to do more to support carers at home and at work. The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 will come into force on 1 April 2018, and we will increase the use of the carer positive scheme, with the aim of signing up at least 30 per cent of employers. Employers need to be aware of the growing numbers of carers and, crucially, the business case for supporting those who juggle paid work with unpaid caring.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): Does the minister agree that, given that there are women carers in the Parliament, it is important that extending the working day at very short notice should not become a matter of course?

Angela Constance: That, of course, would be a matter for the Parliamentary authorities and the Parliamentary Bureau. As a minister, I do not—for good reason—set the parliamentary timetable.

Historically, this Parliament has had different working practices from those that take place in Westminster, although we will all have to accept that, from time to time, particularly as we broach the unknown of Brexit, we may well see extended business hours. We will have to consider those with caring responsibilities, but I suppose that my responsibility is not necessarily to reflect the caring responsibilities of women in the chamber but to represent the hundreds of thousands and millions of women in Scotland—who are far less privileged than the women who sit in the chamber—who carry day-to-day caring and employment struggles.

Ban Ki-moon said:

“Countries with higher levels of gender equality have higher economic growth. Companies with more women on their boards have higher returns. Peace agreements that include women are more successful. Parliaments with more

women take up a wider range of issues—including health, education, anti-discrimination, and child support.”

We cannot escape the importance of women's representation in public life.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Will the minister take an intervention?

Angela Constance: No. I am about to run out of time; perhaps I will be able to do so when I am summing up.

This week, Engender published “Sex & Power in Scotland 2017”. The report shows that we still have a long way to go. It highlights that, in 2017, women still have unequal access to power, decision making and participation throughout all areas of public life, with men holding 73 per cent of the estimated 3,029 positions of power and authority identified. We are doing all that we can to change those figures.

Members will be aware that the Government launched 50:50 by 2020, a voluntary campaign to encourage gender balance in boardrooms across the public, private and third sectors. New figures on appointments to public boards in 2016 show that the proportion and numbers of women continue to increase: 43 per cent of applicants and 59 per cent of those appointed were women, and the overall percentage of women on those boards is 45 per cent. Of course, 45 per cent is not 51 per cent, so there is still more to do. The draft Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Bill will help to build on and cement those gains. We are consulting on the bill, which is due to be introduced to Parliament before the summer recess.

Today, I have mentioned some of the achievements of Scotland's women and some of the work that is in hand, but we also need to be vigilant so that the gains that we have made are not rolled back. We must protect the rights that women have fought for and gained. As the writer Zadie Smith said:

“progress is never permanent, will always be threatened, must be redoubled, restated, and *reimagined* if it is to survive.”

That is the challenge for us all as we approach international women's day.

I move,

That the Parliament unites, ahead of UN International Women's Day on 8 March 2017, to reaffirm its commitment to upholding and protecting the rights of women, which are fundamental human rights; welcomes this year's theme, Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030, which seeks to ensure that women are empowered to take up the opportunities of work and ensure that the barriers to women entering and progressing in the workplace at all levels and in all sectors are addressed; notes the work of the Scottish Government to ensure and

increase equality in the workplace, and welcomes research that shows that increasing female leadership and gender equality in the workforce can benefit the workplace, society and the economy.

15:33

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I am extremely pleased to have the opportunity to speak today ahead of tomorrow's international women's day, and I am grateful to Angela Constance for securing the debate. However, my voice might not last long, as I have a bit of a sore throat.

I will first speak a little about women's economic empowerment around the world. United Nations statistics show that, globally, just 50 per cent of women are represented in the labour market, compared with three quarters of men. Not only are women less likely to be able to support themselves financially through work outside the domestic setting, but when they work, it is more likely to be in lower-paid, lower-skilled occupations that are devoid of workers' rights.

I have spoken before in the chamber about the UK Government's investment in preventing violence against women and girls globally. The Department for International Development has allocated £184 million to a number of programmes to tackle gender violence issues such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage and female infanticide. In recognition of the fact that education is key to economic equality, the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, announced last month a renewed drive to ensure that the 61 million girls who are deprived of an education around the world get a chance to go to school.

Those are just some of the initiatives that are going on. I am also pleased that Dr Whiteford's private member's bill, the Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Ratification of Convention) Bill, has passed to the House of Lords for consideration. In the UK, we have a lot to celebrate. In the past few years, there has been a lot of progress for women as the UK has led the way in pushing for equality for women in the workplace.

Although disparities are less extreme in the UK than they are globally, we still need to make progress. Many members will have seen in the newspapers over the weekend reports that Scotland's women are being denied top jobs. It is right to highlight a tendency on the part of some men—and women—to downplay what needs to be done because of the relatively good position of UK women in the global context. Only 27 per cent of the top 3,000 or so leadership positions across the spectrum of industries and job sectors are filled by women. None of Scotland's FTSE 100 companies has a female chief executive officer, and none of

the big newspapers is edited by a woman—I am sure that many members will mention that.

My amendment mentions the UK Government's work to increase equality in the workplace, which should be commended.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I acknowledge the points that Annie Wells makes. She praised the UK Government, but how does she respond to the recent analysis by the independent women's budget group, which shows that the tax and benefit changes that the UK Government has made since 2010 will have hit women's incomes twice as hard as men's by 2020?

Annie Wells: We are all here today to ensure that we get equality for everyone. We might want to get there in different ways, but we all want equality—I certainly do.

The percentage of women on FTSE 100 boards has doubled from more than 12.5 per cent to nearly 27 per cent. In response to improvements, the UK Government commissioned a report from Lord Davies in 2015. He recommended a new target of 33 per cent, which is to be extended to FTSE 300 companies by 2020. I am pleased that the UK Government supports that recommendation.

Another measure, which will come into force next month, means that larger employers will have to publish information about the gender pay gap and the bonus gap. In the UK, the gender pay gap is at its lowest-ever level; it is currently 17 per cent, which is down from more than 19 per cent in 2015. That represents the biggest year-on-year drop since 2010.

According to statistics, there is a 2 per cent gap between the gender pay gap in Scotland and that in the rest of the UK. When it comes to top jobs and senior positions, Scotland is lagging behind. Although 25 per cent of boardroom seats in Scotland's listed companies are taken by women, the proportion in Scotland is lower than that in the UK as a whole. According to a study by the Chartered Management Institute, the gender pay gap in Scotland for managerial positions is the highest in the UK, at nearly £10,900, whereas the UK average is just under £9,000.

As we know, the Scottish Government plans to introduce its gender representation on public boards bill this year. However, it is still not clear how organisations that fail to comply with the proposed new law will be sanctioned, and nor is it clear how the Scottish Government will provide measures to encourage equal board membership in private companies. So far, only a limited number of Scotland's 360,000-plus private firms have signed the Scottish Government's pledge to make boards 50:50 by 2020. I am concerned that, if we

do not have measures that properly address underlying structural issues, we will not make progress.

Yesterday, I visited the Glasgow-based professional technical services provider FDM Group. It was enlightening to learn more about the initiatives that FDM has introduced and is introducing to encourage more women and ex-military personnel into its employment ranks. It is interesting that that private company, which has won a raft of awards for its progress on employment diversity, does not use gender quotas, although it boasts a management board that is 50 per cent men and 50 per cent women. FDM does that off its own back, without mandatory Government legislation, because it recognises that encouraging equality in its workforce creates energy and enthusiasm, which, in turn, benefit business.

In the political world, my party's record on leadership is something of which I never get tired. We are the only party in UK history to have returned two female Prime Ministers, and we are the only party to have female leaders at Westminster and in the Scottish Parliament.

I know that there is more work to be done—I absolutely do. I also know that, in the Scottish Parliament, women are only a fifth of my party's members. Despite that, I still believe firmly that gender quotas are not the best way of empowering women in the long term.

I have spoken a lot on the issue before. I do not seek to belittle the achievements of those here today who benefited from all-women shortlists and quotas, but I should be allowed to voice my belief that, in an ideal world, if we are to see long-term, meaningful changes that get more women into politics, change should be organic.

That is why I am delighted to say that last week I launched Women2Win Scotland alongside the Prime Minister, Theresa May. That organisation endeavours to inspire and support more women into our party by addressing underlying structural issues in the long term. By providing mentoring, training and networking opportunities, we want to encourage and support the brightest and best women in our party to come forward and make a difference. Far from burying our heads in the sand, as other parties would like to portray us, we are working to improve women's representation in the Scottish Conservatives.

I am running out of time, so to close, I reiterate my support for international women's day and express my commitment to improving women's equality in the workplace as well as reducing the gender pay gap. We all want women to play their fair part in Britain's top jobs, and we all want women to have access to the same economic

opportunities as men. However, as we shall all agree on today, we should never be complacent about picking up the pace on the issue. There is a lot more to do, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to make that happen.

I move amendment S5M-04440.1, to insert at end:

“, and recognises the work of the UK Government in reducing the gender pay gap and increasing equality in the workplace.”

15:41

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): It is an honour to open on behalf of Scottish Labour and to speak to the amendment in my name. We welcome the Government's motion and the opportunity for the Parliament to mark international women's day 2017. Scottish Labour will vote for the Government motion, but we will set out why we believe that our amendment is necessary.

International women's day is not a day for blandness and nor is it a day for faux consensus. Women's rights are political. That is why we cannot support the Tory amendment, which would have us believe that the UK Government is improving women's lives, when in fact it is doing the exact opposite. International women's day enables feminists around the world to unite and to celebrate the progress that has already been made but, more important, to voice our concerns about the work that is still left to do and to organise for the future.

Harmful gender stereotypes limit women's potential, so I am pleased that the focus of this year's international women's day is on women in the changing world of work. In this country, we are almost half a century on from the passage of the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975—legislation that has been refreshed over the years. However, despite the legal strides that have been made for women's rights at work, including maternity leave rights, protection from sexual harassment and the right to equal pay for work of equal value—rights that were hard fought for and won by the trade union and labour movement over the past few decades—we are still a far cry from achieving equality.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Monica Lennon: I am pressed for time because the debate has been cut short, but I will take an intervention.

Christina McKelvie: As a councillor on Labour-controlled South Lanarkshire Council, will Monica Lennon tell us whether it was appropriate for £200,000 of taxpayers' money to be used to fight a

legal challenge that aimed to ensure that 3,000 women who were employed by that council—for which Monica Lennon has a responsibility—got the equal pay that they deserved?

Monica Lennon: I want all women to get their equal pay claims settled, and I do not think that any local authority that has outstanding equal pay claims is covered in any glory. Christina McKelvie knows my position on that.

As we have just heard, legal equality does not always mean substantive change throughout our society. Women continue to do the majority of caring for dependants and household work, and they earn on average £175 less per week than men. That unequal division of labour means that the majority of women's work can be invisible and that its worth to the economy is not captured. It means reduced opportunity for women and girls to succeed—fewer educational opportunities, less leisure time and, at the most basic level, less economic power.

We must challenge such stereotypes from the ground up and ensure that harmful ideas about differences between boys and girls are challenged at the earliest stages. That is how change will be achieved in the long term.

Last year, the Educational Institute of Scotland launched “Get it Right for Girls”. If it is acted on, that guidance will be an important step forward in how we as a nation start to tackle misogynistic attitudes among children and young people. Misogyny and outdated ideas about what a woman's role should be have no place in 21st century Scotland, and work to tackle them must begin in childhood, because the prevalence of those misogynistic ideas throughout our society means that women are, for the most part, locked out of leadership.

The “Sex and Power in Scotland 2017” report by Engender, which made the front page of the *Sunday Herald* at the weekend, revealed that non-disabled white men hold the majority of power in Scotland—they take up 73 per cent of the leadership roles across politics, the media, sport and business. For those of us in the chamber who are well versed in the unfairness of gender representation, those figures will come as no surprise, but they should make us more determined than ever to make a meaningful change. The overrepresentation of white men in Scotland's positions of power is completely unacceptable, and those who perpetuate the myth that they all got there on merit need to give themselves a shake.

Since 2003, women's representation in the Scottish Parliament has regressed. Although the three main parties have female leaders, female MSPs make up only 35 per cent of members in

this place. It is unacceptable that, in the history of the Scottish Parliament since 1999, there has never been a single black or minority ethnic woman MSP. It is also ridiculous that women make up less than a quarter of councillors in local authorities, which control billions of pounds of public money. That might go some way towards explaining the problems that we have had with equal pay in councils.

Women are underrepresented at almost every level of power in Scotland. In locking out the experience and talent of 52 per cent of the population, we are putting limits on Scotland's potential, and I do not believe that we should ever accept a situation that would see progress towards gender equality continue to move at glacial pace.

Labour members passionately support the women 50:50 campaign and its evidence-based calls for legislative gender quotas, because quotas work. Quotas are not about promoting people who are not qualified—far from it. They are about ensuring that those who deserve to be there have an equal chance to take their rightful place.

Women's representation matters because, when women are left out of the decision-making process, our needs are too easily ignored. That is why 86 per cent of the cuts to social security between 2010 and 2020 that the Conservative Government has proposed will have come from women's incomes. It is why £1.5 million has been cut from maternity benefits, and it is why persistent issues about women's health, such as period poverty, continue to be left off the agenda.

When I first raised the issue of period poverty with the Scottish Government last year, I was taken aback to discover that tampons had only ever been mentioned once before in the history of the Parliament's *Official Report*—during a 2004 debate on Scotland's beaches. As a proudly feminist MSP, I am glad to have had the chance to raise women's issues in Parliament and highlight gender inequality at every opportunity.

That is why I am pleased to announce today that I intend to lodge a proposal for a member's bill in the coming months that will directly address access to sanitary products for women and girls across the country. For too long in politics, issues that affect women have not been high on the agenda. Too often, women have been told, “Not just yet,” “Now's not the time,” or, “There are other issues that we need to deal with first, but don't worry—we'll get to that next.”

This year's international women's day should be the Parliament's opportunity to state that we will no longer accept the status of women and girls as second class. The campaign theme of international women's day 2017 is “Be Bold for Change”. We may be few in number, but I know

that there are bold feminists in the Parliament and many more across our country. To the women and girls of Scotland, I say stop being patient—we cannot wait. Recognise your power and demand your rights. I wish all women and girls around the world, but particularly here in Scotland, a happy and powerful international women’s day.

I move amendment S5M-04440.2, after second “workplace” to insert:

“; regrets that the gender pay gap means that women earn significantly less than men, which over the course of a working life is likely to represent hundreds of thousands of pounds of lost income, impacting pension contributions and the ability to save; acknowledges that women remain under-represented in senior roles across politics, business, the public sector, the media, culture and sport, with 73% of leadership roles in Scotland held by men; recognises the Engender report, *Sex and Power in Scotland 2017*, which lays bare these statistics; welcomes the Scottish Government’s commitment to a bill on gender representation on public boards; agrees that the lack of progress towards gender equality in the Parliament, councils and public boards is unacceptable; commends the Women 50:50 campaign and its evidenced-based call for legislative gender quotas.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate, with speeches of up to six minutes, please.

15:49

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): It is a privilege to celebrate international women’s day 2017 by joining colleagues across the chamber in this debate. This can be a time to reflect on the many great achievements that have already been made across many continents, centuries and cultures by so many inspirational women—everyday heroines and national figureheads alike. However, it also a time to reflect on how much there remains to achieve. Although here in Scotland women undoubtedly have it better than in some other places around the world, we still have a long way to go.

I am reminded of the procession for women’s suffrage that took place here in Edinburgh in 1909. Known as the “Great Procession and Women’s Demonstration”, its theme was “What women have done and can and will do”—a theme that I am sure we can all agree is just as pertinent today as it was in 1909. The procession was organised by the suffragette Flora Drummond, who grew up on the Isle of Arran in Ayrshire. Flora was dubbed the General, in part for her efficiency as an organiser but perhaps more for her striking habit of leading women’s rights marches in full military-style uniform atop a large horse. Flora, like many suffragettes, was arrested and imprisoned many times for her campaigning. If the theme of this year’s international women’s Day is “Be Bold for Change”, I can think of few better examples of that than Flora Drummond’s.

Women such as Flora dedicated their lives—putting themselves at great personal risk—to arguing for what to us today is self-evident: that women are equal as citizens to men and should thus have the same right to vote. Those women who campaigned for our right to vote also paved the way for women to sit in this chamber and lead our country today. I feel proud that here in Scotland our Parliament has a female First Minister and a gender-balanced Cabinet, and that the three main political parties have women leading them. In that sense, we might say that the glass ceiling has been smashed, but with women making up 52 per cent of the population but only 35 per cent of MSPs, 25 per cent of local councillors and 16 per cent of council leaders, it is fair to say that there are simply not enough of us in the room.

Although women’s right to participate is no longer questioned, there is no doubt that women in the political workplace have distinct and serious issues to contend with, whether it is the media focusing more on their outfits than the content of their speeches or the more overt and demeaning sexism that is still far too common.

Elaine Smith: Does the member agree that one of those issues is women’s caring responsibilities, and that it is not true to say that that is not an issue in the Parliament, which does nothing to encourage carers into the Parliament?

Ruth Maguire: My colleague Elaine Smith persistently makes her point well in debates such as this one.

In the case of women’s right to vote, the reality matches the legislation, but when it comes to women’s rights to equal pay and freedom from discrimination, although the legislation is there, the reality for women in their day-to-day lives does not always accord with it. For now, the legislation is more aspiration than reality. Legislation is one thing, but changing attitudes is quite another. Legislation can only ever be a step—albeit a very important step—on the road to fundamentally changing attitudes and culture.

Further, there remain crucial areas in which we do not yet have legislation in place to underpin the cultural shift that we must ensure follows. The Scottish National Party Government is taking positive steps to rectify that, with a key example being the domestic abuse bill that will come before Parliament this term. As well as ensuring that coercive and controlling behaviour can be dealt with more effectively, the proposed bill will also help to shape public attitudes by explicitly acknowledging that psychological abuse is unacceptable and criminal. That is important, because preventing and addressing violence against women demands that fundamental change in societal attitudes.

The Scottish Government's current definition of prostitution is also important in sending a strong message—the “Equally Safe” strategy describes it unambiguously as a form of violence against women. However, under the current law in Scotland, the buying and selling of sexual access to women's bodies for profit remains legal. I have to question what sort of message that sends today, as we all celebrate our campaign for gender equality.

I want to see more women in positions of power in our political institutions, in our public sector, media and cultural bodies and in our businesses. I commend all the work that goes into achieving that. However, on this international women's day, when we are being asked to “Be Bold for Change”, I say that, as long as women and girls can be bought and sold like objects, there can be no equality and no social justice. Equality must be about all women, not just privileged and powerful ones. I look forward to working with colleagues across the chamber who are bold enough to make our shared aspiration of a fair and equal Scotland a reality.

15:54

Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con): I welcome this debate ahead of international women's day and I am pleased to share a platform today with both male and female colleagues.

Last week, I helped to launch Women2Win Scotland with my friends and fellow MSPs Annie Wells and Alison Harris. At the event, both Ruth Davidson and Theresa May spoke passionately about empowering women into politics. Those women have much in common—both are role models, both help to lead the Conservative Party north and south of the border and both make a positive contribution to public life. They come from diverse backgrounds and trod different paths to the door of politics, but both got to where they are today on merit—by being the best at what they do.

It is important that women are empowered, not only here in the UK but further afield, both nationally and internationally.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I am in this Parliament as a result of an all-female shortlist. Would the member say that I do not have a right to be here and that I am not here on merit?

Rachael Hamilton: I think that we need to address the underlying issues within business and organisations that drive this kind of behaviour. I am glad that Gillian Martin is here on that basis. I am different because we did not have a gender selection process. I am here on my own merit, too.

The United Nations' theme for international women's day, which is “Women in the Changing

World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030”, addresses the implications of the changing world of work for women, which include issues such as globalisation and technology as well as the growing informality of labour and the environmental impact of fiscal and trade policy.

Globally, as members will know, only 50 per cent of working-age women are represented in the labour force, compared with 76 per cent of men. Most women work part time or are the designated carer. What is more, an overwhelming majority of women are in the informal economy. Some 61.5 per cent of women are in services, while only 23 per cent of seats in Parliament are taken up by women and only 4 per cent of chief executive officers of Fortune 500 companies are women. Internationally, there is much more work to do to provide opportunities for women and to break down barriers constructed by gender.

Tom Arthur: Will the member give way?

Rachael Hamilton: I would like to make some progress.

Last year, I welcomed a parliamentary delegation from Kenya with David Stewart MSP. I will read part of a letter that I received from one of the women representatives, which gives an insight into the difficulties that women face in emerging economies.

“I was delighted to hear that you are well represented by females in the Scottish Parliament. Here in Kenya, we hope that the same will become a reality one day. In our country, we still have a long way to go to achieve gender equality. Most women in universities and colleges here tend to shy away from taking up courses that will open their way to achieving gender equality. We as women parliamentarians try our best to reach to those still in learning institutions to get them to take up courses leading to leadership roles.”

Conservative peer Baroness Jenkin—alongside Prime Minister Theresa May—has worked tirelessly to improve the number of women in the UK Parliament, and that has been a success. We have seen a doubling of female Conservative MPs since 2005, the latest recruit being Trudy Harrison MP, who achieved an historic victory in the Copeland by-election. She decided to stand after being inspired by the PM's conference speech.

We still fight inequality at home in Scotland. Annie Wells touched on the recent study that found that women fill only 812, or 27 per cent, of the 3,029 top leadership positions in Scotland across politics, business, the public sector, the media, culture and sport. In Scotland, women are at the forefront of party leadership in politics, but in business, women continue to be underrepresented in senior management roles. Businesses need to encourage more women at the grass roots by creating more modern apprenticeships, work experience and sponsorships, so that women are nurtured and supported through their careers. A

good example is Paula Nickolds, who joined John Lewis as a graduate trainee in 1994 and is now its first female managing director.

Of course, we do not see inequality only in the workplace. Fewer women work in high-paid sectors such as engineering, information technology and technology. A key element that we must strive for is a reduction in the gender pay gap, which many members have spoken about today. Unfortunately, in that regard, Scotland is falling behind the rest of the UK. The gender pay gap in Scotland for managerial positions is the highest in the UK, at £10,862, compared with the UK average of £8,964, according to the Chartered Management Institute. Also, in Scotland, the median gross pay for female workers has grown at the lowest rate of any UK nation, rising by only 1.5 per cent, compared with a UK average of 3.1 per cent.

Angela Constance: Will the member take an intervention?

Rachael Hamilton: I am in my last minute—I am sorry.

Ending the gender pay gap is so important—not just for equality reasons, but also for economic ones. Ending the gap would add £17 billion to the economy—proving that equality makes economic sense. The UK Government recognises that, and so does the Scottish Government. We are working hard on all fronts to tackle gender inequality. That is why we have seen the gender pay gap fall to 18.1 per cent this year, and the UK has experienced its biggest year-on-year drop since 2010.

Presiding Officer, there is more to do—nobody says that there is not. We need to work together in this chamber to see women get to 50:50 in politics, in business and in every walk of life. I am confident that, with women at the wheel, helping to drive that message forward, working for gender equality will eventually become obsolete.

16:01

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I am fed up with the type of things that we still have to do on international women's day. I cannot be the only one who wants to see it change.

I cannot wait for the day when women do not have to use this day—or tomorrow—to draw attention to things that should have stopped decades ago. That will be the day when we do not have to rage against a world where FGM exists; or where girls are captured from a village and taken away to be sex slaves for Boko Haram and never heard of again; or where women still earn less than men over their lifetime; or where benefit sanctions are put in place that adversely affect

women significantly more than men; or where women are still victims of domestic abuse, both mental and physical; or where universal credit is paid to only one person in a partnership, in a household, which means that women in abusive relationships have no financial independence.

I cannot wait for the time when, if a woman is attacked on a night out, people do not still think it important to know what she was wearing, how much alcohol she had had to drink and what her sexual history is—as if that were a factor in determining whether she really was a victim or just a daft lassie who had it coming.

I do not want the women against state pension inequality, or WASPI women, to have to take to the streets to get the pension that they are entitled to and for which they have worked all their lives.

I would like not to have to join my Catalan sisters—as I did two years ago, in Barcelona, on international women's day—to protest about the constant threat of abortion being made illegal by right-leaning Governments. I would like to stop holding placards proclaiming that making abortion illegal only makes abortion deadly; it does not stop abortion. I would like to stop having conversations with women who are genuinely frightened that such a law could be brought back in at any time, putting the health and rights of women back decades in that country.

I would like to stop pressing for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee to take evidence on the gender pay gap, as we started to do this very morning, and then to hear—as we did—that, in the financial services industry, men earn 83 per cent more in bonuses than their female counterparts do.

I would really like to stop having to explain on Twitter to people from all over the country that pay inequality did not end with the Equal Pay Act in 1970, so that everything is all right now and I can stop bleating on about it. While I am on the subject of Twitter, I would like to see my female political friends and colleagues being challenged on their political ideas, rather than being subjected to misogynist abuse because someone disagrees with them. I would also like to see First Ministers or Prime Ministers not reduced by the media to shoes—or to Miley Cyrus impersonators or Dalmatian-loving Disney cartoon characters, for that matter.

I would like to say—with utter conviction—to my daughter that if she studies and works hard, she will not have to worry about reaching the very top of her profession, even if she falls in love with someone and has kids with them, because caring will be everyone's responsibility and no one will ever assume that it is just her job. I would like to tell her that no boss will ever say to her that it is a

shame that she is going off to have a baby, because he was under the impression that she was interested in her career—just like my former boss said to me when I had my daughter's older brother 18 years ago.

I would also like to see an end to the UK Government rape clause, which penalises a woman financially if she has more than two children unless she can prove that she has been raped.

Let us get rid of the marches happening all over the world in March this year that will be full of pussy-hatted women waving placards condemning pussy-grabbing presidents. One of my favourite placards is the one that says "I can't believe we still have to protest this"—or swearer variations of that. That is how I feel.

Let us replace those marches with a carnival celebrating the fact that we have educated people that it is not okay to force yourself on a woman, no matter who you are, and that no one who ever suggests that it is okay will ever get within an inch of power. Let us turn international women's day into a celebration of the achievements of women, as my friend and colleague Ruth Maguire advocated so eloquently in her speech. Let us study those achievements in our history classes in schools. Let us have lessons that have as much Winnie Ewing in them as they do Winston Churchill, that have Elsie Inglis being celebrated as a war hero alongside Field Marshall Montgomery, and that rightly paint Flora MacDonald as the type of strong woman who a prince in distress needs to get him out of Dodge when the going gets too tough for the lad, rather than as any kind of silly love interest. Let us get to the position where we do not ever answer "Watson and Crick" to a pub quiz question about who discovered DNA, but answer "Watson, Crick and Rosalind Franklin". If I ever run a quiz and members give the former answer to that question, they will get only half a point.

Let us look forward to an international women's day that is wholly about celebration, and does not have to be about all the things that we thought we would be done with banging on about long before now.

16:06

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I will be very pleased to support the Labour amendment. I cannot support the Conservative amendment, as I believe that Conservative austerity perpetuates gender inequality.

The eve of international women's day 2017 is a good day to talk about sex and power. As we have heard, women make up 52 per cent of the Scottish population, but we do not see that reflected in our

Parliament and we see it even less so in council chambers across the country. Yes, three of our major parties are led by women, and they are fantastic role models for young and old alike. Yes, we have a First Minister who helped deliver Scotland's first gender-balanced Cabinet. Yes, many parties, including my own, operate a gender-balancing system to select candidates, and the SNP used all-women shortlists for the first time in the 2016 Holyrood elections. When people suggest that women should be elected on merit, they are asserting that women are less able than men and that that is why fewer of them are elected.

Yet women make up just 35 per cent of members of the Scottish Parliament, 25 per cent of local councillors and 17 per cent of members of the European Parliament. That is why I, along with Kezia Dugdale, founded women 50:50, which is the campaign for at least 50 per cent representation of women in our Parliament, in our councils and on public boards.

It is not just that we have a long way to go to be a diverse and inclusive Parliament—it is that we are going backwards. At the time of the Parliament's inception in 1999, 37 per cent of MSPs were women. That number has now dropped—although not by a lot—to 35 per cent. It is no coincidence: across the world, voluntary approaches have seen progress stall or regress at a saturation point of around 35 per cent in recent years. That means that the time for voluntary approaches is over. Women 50:50 wants legislation that would mean that at least 50 per cent of candidates that parties put forward in the Scottish Parliament and council elections must be women. We want similar legislation for public boards.

As members know, the theme of this year's international women's day is, "Be bold for change". On Saturday, when I sat in the public gallery, there were women on every seat in this chamber. I heard from Linda from Ghana, who spoke about the impact that fair trade had made on her life. I heard a heartfelt emotional plea from African women who asked the Scottish Parliament to do all that we can to end female genital mutilation.

We need to take bold, decisive action now to secure proper representation in our workforce for women, those who are disabled and the BME community.

Women should be equally represented in civil and political life and it is not just the Scottish Parliament that is lagging behind. Members will be aware of these figures, but they bear repetition. Women make up 28 per cent of public body chief executives, 26 per cent of university principals and 7 per cent of senior police officers. Women are 63 per cent of secondary school teachers, but only 41

per cent of headteachers. Women are 19 per cent of major museum and art gallery directors and just 14 per cent of national sport body chief executives. Most shockingly of all, women are 0 per cent of CEOs of top businesses and—as Annie Wells suggested—no women are major newspaper editors so it is no wonder that, when reading the papers, one would think that women in Scotland do not play sport. Laura Muir, for example, had to break a European record and win two gold medals to gain coverage, but it is quite normal for newspapers to report, at length, a lower-league football match that men happen to have taken part in.

White, non-disabled men hold the most power in Scotland and they will continue to do so unless we take deliberate action to change our attitudes and cultural expectations about leadership and authority, and to break down the barriers that women face. Those include structural issues such as a lack of flexible work, unlawful harassment and discrimination, through to the insidious assumption that women do not belong around tables where decisions are made.

One of the biggest barriers to gender equality is the economic inequality between women and men in Scotland. If someone is struggling to buy their tea or pay their bus fare, they are less likely to become involved in politics. Inequality exists in the formal economy where the gender pay gap and lack of access to sustainable jobs means that women earn less and have less influence than men. However, to understand the full story of women in work—Elaine Smith focused on this issue—we need to look beyond paid work and consider the invisible work that is carried out by women, largely.

We know that women devote twice as much time to household work as men and that at least 62 per cent of unpaid carers are women. Unpaid work props up our economy, but it is not included in the calculations of Governments and international financial institutions. All the unpaid caring that women—and some men—do for children, sick and disabled people, and older people goes uncounted, despite its enormous contribution to our economy and social wellbeing. I am pleased to support Engender's call to make such work visible by gathering women's accounts of days in which they work in the formal labour market, but also plan meals, buy groceries, do laundry, collect medicines for family members, provide personal care for children and older people, cook, clean and manage their households. I acknowledge that there are exceptions, but how many men in the chamber can say the same?

The World Economic Forum predicts that the gender gap will not close entirely until 2186, which is too long to wait. We need to be bold for change.

Until women make up at least 50 per cent of Parliament and 50 per cent at every level of Government and until there is a complete reduction in violence against women, we will not have had the change that we need.

International women's day was called international working women's day and I believe that that was a more appropriate name for this celebration.

16:13

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): March 8 is an important date for women around the world each year, whether in the first or third world, or in developed or developing countries, or rich or poor countries. It is a day on which we remind ourselves of the struggle to achieve equality that so many women have fought and died for over the decades and centuries. It is also a stark reminder of how far we have still to go. No matter the issue—equal pay, employment opportunities, gender-based violence or respect and recognition for achievements and roles in society—women are still fighting for equality and parity.

That is why we must be bold for change: the hashtag #BeBoldForChange is the defining theme of international women's day in 2017. To be bold, women must be seen and heard, we must act on our beliefs and promises, and we must lead. Improving female representation in the workplace is a challenge for any Government, unless it is bold. The Scottish Government's initiative, "Partnership for change 50:50 by 2020", is a step in the right direction, but when we see the statistics on female representation on boards of public and private organisations, we can see that it is not enough. There is no female chief executive officer in any of Scotland's top companies and only one in four company directors is female. In the public sector, only 28 per cent of chief executives are women. When we compare those figures to the fact that women make up 52 per cent of Scotland's population, we should be embarrassed as a nation that women are not offered the same opportunities as men. The reasons for that are social and economic, and they go back decades, if not centuries.

It is less than 100 years since women won the right to vote, and we are still underrepresented in public and political life. The Engender briefing for today's debate shows that although there has been an increase in the proportion of female Government ministers, members of Parliament, and local authority chief executives, the total of each is no more than 25 per cent. We know there is still a lot of work ahead, so regardless of party affiliation and political or religious beliefs, we should all work together as one to overcome the

social and economic problems that leave many women behind.

As we have heard, the global gender pay gap is not expected to close until 2186—in 169 years—and means that our daughters, their daughters, their daughters and possibly even their daughters will still be paid less than men for the same work. Research tells us that the UK gender pay gap will close by 2069.

The gender pay gap does not reveal the many other ways in which women lose out in the work place. Women are more likely than men to be employed in part-time roles and tend to be socialised into taking on unpaid roles such as caring for children and elderly relatives. It is estimated that globally women spend an average of 4.5 hours per day on unpaid work. The difference is even greater in the developing world. It is thought that in India, for example, women undertake 6 hours of unpaid work each day, with men carrying out less than 1 hour. Where women do participate in the world of work, they tend to be concentrated in the low-paid and lower-skilled roles that are often referred to as the five Cs—cleaning, catering, clerical, cashiering and caring work. Research also shows that only one in five people working in science, technology, engineering and maths jobs is a woman.

Occupational segregation is unfair not only to women who find that opportunities are closed to them, but to all. It is damaging to our cultures and societies that women cannot express themselves whole-heartedly or aim to achieve better for themselves or their children.

I take this opportunity to highlight some fantastic female role models in my home area of Renfrewshire. We have women running our airport, our college and our council, and taking on the most daring of challenges to raise money for charity. So, in closing, I praise Amanda McMillan of Glasgow airport, Audrey Cumberland of West College Scotland, and Renfrewshire Council's Sandra Black and Provost Anne Hall.

16:18

Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am delighted to participate in today's debate ahead of international women's day. International women's day is an opportunity to celebrate women's economic, social, cultural and political achievements. It is worth celebrating our progress, but let us not for a moment imagine that the job is done.

One of the themes of this year's international women's day is the hashtag #BeBoldForChange. We have made some bold changes already, but we should not be complacent or take progress for

granted. We need concerted and deliberate action if we are to achieve gender equality.

One obvious thing that we should celebrate is that 60 per cent of our leaders of political parties that are represented in the chamber are women: our First Minister and the leaders of the two largest Opposition parties are women. They may well have different beliefs, but each one of those leaders is a fantastic role model and their success should be celebrated.

That is great progress, but members should not let such headline figures mislead them: many women are still not making it to the top. Women make up 52 per cent of the population, but anyone would be forgiven for thinking that we are a minority group, considering how poorly women are represented in political life. As others have said, only 35 per cent of MSPs are women, 25 per cent of local councillors are women, 16 per cent of council leaders are women and 17 per cent of MEPs are women. We know that women face persistent barriers to achieving leadership roles throughout their lives. Some of those are structural barriers, such as the lack of flexible work. Local authorities are the training ground for politicians. In the Highland Council area, where I come from, the huge distances and overnight stays that are needed make it difficult for young parents of either gender to get involved.

The most insidious barrier is the cultural assumption that women just do not belong in certain roles. Engender talk about the insidious cultural assumption that women do not belong around decision-making tables. Since I have become a politician, there have been many occasions on which I have been the only woman at the table. On one memorable occasion, I was the only woman at a table of 20—about which the organisers could not apologise to me enough. It is absolutely clear that there are not enough women in politics.

I was a leader in the brownies for many years, and Girlguiding UK is a fantastic organisation that definitely puts girls in the lead. A couple of years ago, I was helping the local guide unit with a politics badge—or “Go for its!”, as we call them. This one was called “Be the change”. I asked the girls to name powerful women. They were unusually quiet; they were unusually quiet for a long time. Then a young girl, who I think was about 10 years old, piped up: “This would be much easier if it was men you asked us to think of.”

If I achieve nothing else in my time as a politician, I hope that perhaps just seeing me here might inspire and empower other young girls who are growing up in the Highlands to think, “I can do that”.

We have talked about STEM subjects. When I was a teenager, I was a serious science geek and got good highers in mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology. When it came to choosing my university course however, I chose to study pharmacy and became a health professional, not an engineer. I have reflected a lot on that choice. Do not get me wrong—I have no regrets. Nobody told me that I could not be an engineer; nonetheless, it never crossed my mind that I could.

The final point that I want to make is about the gender pay gap. Progress on the issue is painfully slow. Women working full-time in Scotland still earn on average 6.2 per cent less than men. Equalising women's productivity could add almost £600 billion to the economy. It makes great business sense to close the gap.

The legislation on women's equal pay was introduced before I was born, but I will, at the rate it is going, be nearly 100 years old by the time the gap closes. Even with legislation, that is the slow pace of organic change as advocated by my Conservative colleagues. Women should not have to wait that long for equality. We deserve it now.

One of the themes for this year's international women's day is the hashtag #BeBoldForChange. We should be bold: we should put ourselves forward, because when we get involved in men's jobs, we do them well. I want all of us in this chamber to encourage young girls to realise that there are no limits to what we can achieve. So, sisters—I say this to all women in Scotland—be bold, be the change that you want to see in society, speak up, move out of your comfort zone, ask for a pay rise and ask for promotion. As we say in the girl guides, "Go for it!"

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Alex Cole-Hamilton is next—you cannot be a sister but I am sure that you support those comments.

16:24

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. I rise to add my voice to those of the many members who have made excellent speeches this afternoon. I congratulate the Government on the consensual motion and the Labour Party on its excellent amendment. I will support both.

On the night of Tuesday 8 November, speaking from a hotel in San Francisco, newly elected Democratic senator Kamala Harris invoked the memory of a great champion for equality when, in a victory speech that was tinged with grief at the dawning realisation of a Trump presidency, she said:

"It is important to remember what Coretta Scott King taught us: that the fight for civil rights—the fight for justice and equality—must be fought and won with each generation. It is the very nature of this fight that whatever gains we make, they will not be permanent."

The intervening weeks have shown, in stark relief, the measure of the challenge that befalls our generation in the struggle that we now face for equality in general and women's rights in particular. International women's day this year carries an import far deeper than in previous years because a cold, patriarchal misogyny has swept the democratic institutions of the United States. It is in policies that are defined by an Administration that passes off things such as sexual molestation as "locker-room talk", with a commander-in-chief who is on public record stating his belief that women who seek to terminate their pregnancies, for whatever reason, should face some sort of sanction or punishment for that intensely private decision. If only we were all now witnessing a woman in that particular workplace.

However, as we unite in justified condemnation of the emergence of that misogyny overseas, we do well to remember the journey that our own nation is still on in terms of realising women's rights, delivering equality and tackling violence against women, everyday sexism and body shaming here at home. However, as we have heard so many times this afternoon, nowhere are the frontiers more evident than in the workplace.

It is not fair to pick favourites among your constituents but I am sure that members will indulge me as I do just that. Her name is Darcy, she is two years old, and she runs my family. She is every bit as switched on and determined as her older brothers. She has a keen sense of justice—oh boy, does she have a keen sense of justice. I am quite determined that, as she progresses through education and into the workplace of her choosing, she will do so with the same opportunities and expectation of fair treatment as her brothers.

In 2030—the year that, for this international women's day, we have identified as the year for 50:50 parity in the workplace—Darcy will turn 16. Like her peers, she will be sitting life-defining exams and looking with bright optimism towards a career. We will have failed her and the millions of little girls like her if she takes on the same job as her brothers but is valued less or is expected to bring home a smaller pay packet. We will have failed her if we do not ensure that the governance of the company or organisation that she seeks to join is made up of a balance of men and women. We will have failed her if her employer insists that, because of her gender, she must wear a certain type of heel or length of dress, on pain of dismissal.

It is astonishing that, in our enlightened times, we in this Parliament should still number off the battle lines where prejudice, underrepresentation and underemployment still hold sway in respect of women in the workplace.

It is on the issue of maternity discrimination that I want to focus. Towards the end of last year, I was visited by a constituent who, until the birth of her first child, had been the chief executive officer of a major national organisation. Overnight, her board seemed to turn against her; it managed her out very swiftly. She fought for justice for three years and, in many ways, she is still fighting today. She opened my eyes to an astonishing reality—in our country, 77 per cent of mothers in paid work still face, at some point, some kind of discrimination as a result of their motherhood, while only 3 per cent ever challenge that discrimination through internal procedures. Many lack the energy for the fight; many are not aware of their rights; and many simply no longer have faith in the system that did that to them. My own party took steps at the UK level to bring shared parental leave into the consideration of maternity leave in order to begin a turn in cultural expectations around parenthood, but we still have far to travel.

Delivering gender equality is not always straightforward and it is not always comfortable. It may often jar with long-held views of fairness and what is right. In what was an excellent speech—indeed, one of the finest that I have heard her deliver in her career—Monica Lennon explained the difficulties that we face in delivering gender equality in politics. My party grappled with the issue for many years, hoping that it would happen organically. However, it took the strength of our party leader, Willie Rennie, to deliver a change at our party conference that led to our first-ever all-women shortlists. I am proud that, as a result, our next Westminster candidate for Edinburgh West will be a woman.

Whether we are talking about the regressive assault on reproductive rights in America or the arcane structures and expectations of the workplace in this country, it is on these frontiers that a theme emerges: the way in which the decisions of men in positions of power shape the lives of women. That point was brought home to me with clarity when, in 2000, I spent the afternoon with Dr Carl Djerassi, an American scientist who invented the contraceptive pill. He was a passionate feminist, and he described to me the pressure that he came under in 1950s America to focus his research on a contraceptive pill for men. His response to that pressure was as elegant as it was brave. He explained to me that developing a pill for men would have done nothing about the nature of male control over the female reproductive system. In the early days of his

research, he saw the liberation that that reversal of control could bring. He died last year, but I will seek to carry that spirit and to emulate his commitment in all that I do in the time that is afforded to me as a legislator. In that spirit, I will seek to build a better society for my daughter.

16:31

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): When are we going to live in a world that does not need to have an international women's day? Why, in this futuristic 21st century, do we still need to fight for equality, parity and recognition? The reason why we need to stand together is because, for many women, there is no equality, parity or recognition. We live in a world in which a girl with a book who seeks an education gets a bullet in the head because men are afraid of her femininity. The power of an educated woman terrifies the patriarchy. Malala Yousafzai tells us that

“we cannot all succeed if half of us are held back.”

She is correct. We live in a world that still thinks that it is okay to use physical punishment and coercive control on wives and partners and which allows not-so-honourable honour-based violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Today, in this modern world, 63 million girls of school age do not get an education. Not very modern, is it? The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund says:

“Girls' education is both an intrinsic right and a critical lever to reaching other development objectives. Providing girls with an education helps break the cycle of poverty: educated women are less likely to marry early and against their will; less likely to die in childbirth; more likely to have healthy babies; and are more likely to send their children to school. When all children have access to a quality education rooted in human rights and gender equality, it creates a ripple effect of opportunity that influences generations to come.”

Again I ask, why, in this digital and futuristic world, do we still have gender imbalance and inequality? Why, in this modern UK, do we have welfare reforms that have had a catastrophic detrimental effect on 86 per cent of all female claimants? Why do we have a Labour-controlled council in South Lanarkshire and many more councils spending—to their shame—millions of pounds fighting against giving women equal pay? Why do we have those things? Because, for some—not all—of the politicians in the Parliament, this is all just talk. That needs to change. I did not hear any of them speak up when Philip Davies MP attempted to filibuster during the debate on Eilidh Whiteford's bill on domestic violence or when he described women as militant feminists—how very dare we seek equality? I heard no voices against him, so, please, spare me the fake indignation.

Why is it important to make a stand, raise our voices, become activists, march and campaign? I agree with Martina Navratilova when she says that “the key for women is not to set any limits.”

I add that we should not let others set limits for us. That is why it is important. It is important that those of us who have some success have a duty to not pull up the ladder but to give a hand up to other women. Madeleine Albright also reminds us that

“there is a special place in hell for women who don’t help” other women.

International women’s day is important because we have such a long way to go. In some senses, it feels like we are going backwards, especially when male MPs bark at female MPs in the so-called mother of all Parliaments and when the leader of the free world freely admits to physical sexual assault of women and passes it off as just locker-room banter. Trump’s actions and frankly misogynistic talk have given permission to many in the patriarchy to hark back to what we thought was a bygone age when assaulting, insulting and body shaming women was considered just a bit of fun or some “locker-room talk”. Well, it is not: it is not acceptable, it is not tolerable and we will not put up with it.

To highlight Trump’s disgusting remarks, women around the world are taking part in the pussy hat global project. They want to share, declare and wear their feminism, and why should they not? They intend to show that feminism and solidarity across the globe by wearing pink knitted hats. Only with solidarity, resilience, commitment and passion will we make this nation, the UK and the world a better place for women and girls—a place in which they feel safe, educated, valued and, most important of all, equal.

That is why we need the annual UN international women’s day. That is why we must continue to fight. That is why we should never stand down, shut up or not take the positions that we take. We need to raise our voices. That is why, with your indulgence, Presiding Officer, I stand here today with my many sisters around the world, wearing my pussy hat and declaring my oath that I will always stand for the equality, parity and recognition that we all deserve. Presiding Officer, indulge me to be bold for change.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do, but can I ask you—

Christina McKelvie: I will share, declare and wear my feminism with pride.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, no, Ms McKelvie.

Christina McKelvie: Who is with me?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms McKelvie—

Christina McKelvie: I am done.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Naughty, naughty. Props are not allowed in the chamber. I will let this occasion pass by, but I do not encourage any props in the chamber from anyone.

16:37

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to speak in this debate on international women’s day, which is not of recent origin, as so many people assume, but has marked the progress of the rights of women for more than 100 years. I will talk for a few moments on the origins of the day.

The start of the 20th century was a time of agitation for women’s rights in a number of European countries, as well as in North America. In the UK, suffragettes such as Mrs Pankhurst and Emily Davidson were campaigning for the right to vote. That right would come in 1918, but only after women had shown through their work in the munitions factories and on the farms that they could take up roles that had traditionally been held by men. Even so, it was not until 1928 that women had the vote on equal terms.

In 1911, the first international women’s day was celebrated in a small number of countries, and in 1913 the day was fixed on 8 March. In 1975, the United Nations celebrated the event for the first time, which gave the day an immediate boost in status and recognition. In 1996, the UN gave further support by adopting an annual theme to focus on a particular aspect to advance the role of women.

In the 106 years since we first celebrated international women’s day, much has been done to progress the rights and standing of women, but as we have heard from previous speakers, much remains to be done. There has been a huge shift for the better in attitudes to women. In the vast majority of countries, including our own, women’s property rights, voting rights, and access to university, jobs, childcare and healthcare are all far better than they were in 1911.

In the Scottish Parliament, all three of the main parties’ leaders are women. However, we still have too few female MSPs. We have heard from Annie Wells what my party is doing to address that. In many areas, glass ceilings have been broken and talented women have won through on merit. For instance, 20 years ago, women sports presenters were unheard of.

Ruth Maguire: Will the member take an intervention?

Alison Harris: I will not, at the moment. Please allow me to continue.

I am just old enough to remember when a woman would take passengers' bus fares but was never the bus driver, or when a woman airline pilot would cause more than a few comments. Let us not forget the progress that women here in the UK have made, but we should also not forget what still needs to be done to create equality for women. As well as the lack of women making the laws, we should also be concerned about the lack of women employed in upholding the law. Only 7 per cent of senior police officers, 13 per cent of Queen's counsels and 23 per cent of sheriffs are women. I do not believe that we need quotas or all-women shortlists, but we need to do far more to encourage women to apply for senior posts, whether in law—

Ruth Maguire: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Alison Harris: No—I am going to continue.

We need to encourage women to apply for senior posts in law, business, science, technology and academia. The Conservative UK Government will continue to seek to eradicate anything that causes anyone to feel that the work of a woman doing the same job as a man is less worthy of reward and respect. I am proud that my party, as we have heard, has given our country two female Prime Ministers, and that the current and immediate past leaders of the Scottish Conservatives have been women. I also want to highlight another reason why I am proud—

Monica Lennon: Will the member give way?

Alison Harris: No. I would like to continue. I am sorry.

I want to mention another reason why I am proud of my party. I have talked of the advances that have been made by women in the UK, while acknowledging—

Gillian Martin: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Alison Harris: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you take any interventions, Ms Harris?

Alison Harris: No, I will not, thank you. I need to continue.

I have talked about the advances that have been made by women in the UK, while acknowledging that there is still a lot more that needs to be done if we are to continue to make progress.

I turn now to the improvements in the lives of women in the poorest countries on earth that

result from UK aid. As a nation, we meet our target of devoting 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product to overseas aid. It is not always popular with voters, but it is the right thing to do. It is used to ensure that children—girls as well as boys—in poor countries from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe get a chance to make more of their lives through better health and education.

It provides money for training women like Fatima in Ghana, who wanted to earn money to support her children by sewing clothes. She now has a start-up loan which has enabled her to buy a sewing machine. Rima from Bangladesh faced disaster when she fell pregnant and her employer refused to give her maternity pay. UK aid provided the funds for a local agency to go to court to force the employer to pay up, thereby winning not only for Rima, but for a number of other employees. Those are just two stories, but there are millions of other women in the third world whose lives have been changed for the better by UK aid.

A hundred years on, I do not know whether Mrs Pankhurst and Emily Davison would be surprised by the extent of the progress that women have made, or disheartened by the lack of it. Perhaps, as Miss Davison was a schoolteacher, the report card might say, "Good progress, but must try harder." I look forward to celebrating international women's day tomorrow.

16:43

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I have spoken at many debates on international women's day over the years. I have tended to focus on my background in science and technology, and today is no different. As many contributors this afternoon have done, I would like to highlight some of my heroes from that world.

If we think of astronomy and the stars and mention the name Cox, many people will think of Brian Cox, but I immediately think of Nagin Cox—a United States Air Force pilot who went on to join the jet propulsion laboratory at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, who has worked on both the Mars Rover and the Galileo missions, and who is now one of the senior managers in the Curiosity Rover projects at NASA. She is an absolutely inspiring woman.

We can also look to the past at NASA. Valerie Thomas was a NASA inventor who was inspired as a young woman by picking up in her local library "The Boys' First Book of Radio and Electronics". Unfortunately, I am old enough to remember those boys' books—and the girls' books, which tended to be about such things as flower pressing. It is worth reflecting on how we discriminated at such an early age as to what young people's ambitions and prospects could be.

Thankfully, Valerie Thomas did not heed her teachers or her parents, who tried to dissuade her from a career in physics. Her inventions include the illusion transmitter, which is currently being used in three-dimensional television technology.

Although the rights of women merit attention in Holyhood today, Hollywood has also turned to the issue with the recent blockbuster movie “Hidden Figures”, which is a biopic that tells the story of Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson and Dorothy Vaughan, who were collectively known as “computers in skirts”. They worked in the Redstone, Mercury and Apollo space programmes for NASA. Although their contribution has been widely unknown in the larger world until now, NASA has been very good at celebrating its women scientists. The movie is based on the book “Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race”. If I had a magic wand, I would change the name of that book. That is because I vividly remember Maya Angelou taking to task James Naughtie on “Bookclub” on Radio 4 for describing her as one of “America’s greatest black authors”. I wish that I had her voice, but I do not. She replied:

“I am one of America’s greatest authors, James. I just happen to be black.”

Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson and Dorothy Vaughan were mathematicians who helped to win the space race. They just happened to be women and black.

Today of all days, it is incumbent on us to reflect on our use of language. On international women’s day, we reflect on whether our language seeks to pigeonhole, diminish, contain or categorise the achievements of women. If that is so, we are all complicit in unconscious bias. Research into unconscious bias is one of the new research areas that help us to understand why it is so difficult for women to achieve their full potential. Such bias is implicit and unconscious, and it happens in our brains incredibly quickly. We can make quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, and we do not even realise that we are doing it. It is influenced by our background, culture, experiences, education and the people with whom we mix and make contact.

The Equality Challenge Unit, which works to further and support equality and diversity among staff and students across the UK in our higher education institutions, has done recent evidence-based research on that. Research was used to identify and change practices that unfairly exclude, marginalise or disadvantage people. The evidence supports the idea that removing barriers to progression will bring greater success for all students—women and men.

The research also found that unconscious bias heavily influences recruitment and selection decisions. Several experiments using CV shortlisting exercises showed that male candidates were rated as better qualified than female candidates, that people wanted to hire males more often, that male candidates were given a higher starting salary, and that people were willing to invest more in male candidates in the selection process. We need to change that, understand unconscious bias, recognise it in every single one of us, and look to have screenings that make people anonymous.

I will finish with a quote from Maya Angelou, who said:

“It is impossible to struggle for civil rights, equal rights for blacks, without including whites. Because equal rights, fair play, justice, are all like the air: we all have it, or none of us has it.”

16:49

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): As has been mentioned, the international women’s day campaign theme this year is “Be Bold For Change”, and there is the specific UN theme of women in the changing world of work. The World Economic Forum has predicted that the global gender gap will not close entirely until 2186, so being bold and taking action are undoubtedly needed.

International women’s day provides the opportunity to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women past and present in helping to progress the gender agenda, to tackle inequality and to fight back against poverty. If we look at the landscape around us, although we see a great many statues and memorials, few celebrate women. The majority of statues are of slave-owning men, wealthy landowners and military figures, which reminds us of our cruel imperialist capitalist history.

Many famous working-class women in the past, such as Janet Hamilton, Jennie Lee and Mary Barbour, challenged poverty, injustice and inequality. They epitomised the idea of being bold for change. Ruth Maguire and Gillian Martin made that point well. I want to see more statues and memorials of women in this country.

International working women’s day was first declared by the German socialist Clara Zetkin in 1910, and 8 March was subsequently chosen in tribute to Manhattan’s women textile workers, who went on strike for decent working conditions. If we go back further, the early struggles for women’s rights were entwined with workers’ rights. The mill girls’ strikes of the 1840s and the match girls’ strikes of 1888 are examples of heroic struggles

against barbaric working conditions, low pay and long hours. The action of women in trade unions led the then Labour Government to introduce the bill that led to the Equal Pay Act 1970 but, as we know, the equal pay battles are still being fought.

To look specifically at the UN theme of women in the changing world of work, I will consider some of the barriers to work for women in 21st century Scotland. In addition to the gender pay gap, we know that women are underrepresented in senior roles and that that must be addressed, but there are other barriers to women entering and progressing in the workplace, of which the most obvious is education. Only 18 per cent of computing students and 16 per cent of engineering students are women, although those subjects are identified as being key to our economic future. Mary Fee and Maree Todd made that point.

The affordability of childcare is another barrier that remains. Many women are trying to fit part-time hours around their partners' work, as they simply cannot afford nursery fees—the free hours do not cover a working day—or they are relying on their mothers. Women parliamentarians work long hours. They might be privileged, as the cabinet secretary said, but they still have caring responsibilities, and non-family-friendly practices will not encourage other women to join us in this place.

There are specific health issues that are barriers to women being economically active, and I will mention some modern-day women campaigners on that. Mesh implants have left many women with appalling injuries and unable to work. We in Scotland could have led the way on protecting women from that health scandal but, instead, the campaigners Elaine Holmes and Olive McIlroy have resigned from the inquiry and said that they have been betrayed. They believe that the report is a whitewash, that it ignores the evidence and that it focuses on an agenda that is led by pro-mesh surgeons, most of whom are probably men. I hope that the Government will look seriously at the issue.

Another women's health scandal—the vast majority who are affected are female—concerns how thyroid sufferers are treated. Until the 1970s, desiccated thyroid hormone was used to treat women with an underactive thyroid. The hormone contains everything that is needed, including T4 and T3. However, synthetic thyroxine, which includes T4 only, was invented and big pharma could make money out of it. Putting aside the women who are not diagnosed or—this is shocking—who are told that they are borderline cases by general practitioners, we know that at least 10 per cent of patients do not do well on T4 alone. Symptoms include severe fatigue,

fibromyalgia and depression, which can all impact on women's ability to work.

Lorraine Cleaver has been taking forward the issue by petitioning the Parliament—for more than four years—for proper diagnosis and treatment. Currently, women are suffering on T4; those who are lucky enough to be on T3 are fighting, because of the rocketing costs, to keep it, or they are buying desiccated thyroid hormone on the internet. I make a plea to the Scottish Government to take that women's issue seriously, to commission proper research and to support an inquiry. The issue also has serious economic impacts for the affected women and the national health service.

A related issue is that of pain sufferers, many of whom are women. It has taken Dorothy-Grace Elder to uncover the scandal of waiting-time failures for chronic pain sufferers, as outlined in yesterday's *Herald*.

Many women in Lanarkshire are waiting up to 24 weeks for initial appointments for joint replacements. That is unacceptable. Many of them are older women who care for husbands or grandchildren. The pain that they are in is shocking. Even a purely economic perspective suggests that such waits cannot continue.

All those cases need bold action. They all impact on women in the workplace and on the invisible work that women do to support our society, which Alison Johnstone outlined extremely well in her excellent speech.

There are many women in Scotland who are campaigning for women's rights and improved conditions. I mentioned some of them; many others, including many young women, are fighting through their trade unions and through campaigns such as better than zero.

Members of the Scottish Parliament are in a position—and have a duty—to take action and demand that the Scottish Government delivers for women. Let us be bold and fight for change that builds on the achievements of all the brave women who went before. Let us stop the discrimination and remove the barriers in the workplace that hold women back, so that we deliver a fairer, more equal and prosperous 21st century Scotland.

16:55

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): I am delighted to have been given the opportunity to celebrate international women's day, and I support the amendment in Annie Wells's name.

It is vital to consider how to empower women in Scotland and it is important to reflect on where the celebration started. International women's day

originated with sporadic celebrations as early as 1909, and the Soviet Union played a major role. I lived for nine years in Azerbaijan, which is one of only 30 countries that recognise international women's day with a non-labour holiday, so I have had the fortune of celebrating the day here and abroad.

Created out of the fall of the Russian empire in May 1918, Azerbaijan was arguably the first successful attempt to establish a democratic state in the Muslim world. We often find ourselves looking towards the middle east, Russia and the far east and criticising countries—rightly so, in many cases—for their lack of progress on equalities. However, we should not just criticise; we should celebrate countries' achievements and encourage them to go further in the universal quest for equality.

As we know, women in the UK did not gain equal voting rights until 1930. Azerbaijan, however, granted women equal political rights in 1919, which made it the first Muslim-majority country to enfranchise women. In 1934, Azerbaijan had its first female Cabinet minister—she was appointed just five years after our own Margaret Bondfield was appointed Minister of Labour. The situation was reversed when, in 2009, Azerbaijan appointed its first female major-general, a full six years before the UK promoted Susan Ridge. In Mehriban Aliyeva, the current vice-president, Azerbaijan has a candidate to emulate our own proud record of female leaders.

A matriarch of my family—my late grandmother, Gina Philips—was chief president in the St John Ambulance brigade, in a role that took her around the world championing not just health but women. Through her, I was lucky enough to meet an icon for women not just in Russia but around the world: Valentina Tereshkova, who holds the momentous title of the first woman to go into space. She was an amazing person and I was honoured to spend a day with her at Star City, outside Moscow, to see the difficult circumstances in which she showed women that they could literally reach the stars.

Let us look closer to home and consider what we are doing to help women in our communities. Just last week at First Minister's question time, I asked the First Minister whether she was as disappointed as I was to hear that a nursery in my constituency will be hit with a business rate hike of 65 per cent. That means inevitable cost increases for parents, which will prevent parents—predominantly mothers—from returning to work.

Gillian Martin: I get that there are issues for businesses that face increased business rates and I am pleased that the member is so concerned about the issue. Does that mean that Conservative members of Aberdeenshire Council will vote alongside my colleagues in the SNP on 9 March

on the proposed local government rates relief scheme that is to be put in place?

Alexander Burnett: I think that my Conservative colleagues in Aberdeenshire Council, like councillors throughout Scotland, will have to vote for rates relief, given the limited funds that they have because of the Scottish Government's cutbacks.

The First Minister's response to my question at FMQs was to attack my colleagues. What relief does the hike in business rates give to the mothers who cannot go back to work? What relief does it give to parents who are trying to give their children early education? The answer is simple: it gives them no relief. Given that international women's day this year is focusing on increasing women's participation in the workplace, I hope that the First Minister will reconsider her response.

We have heard many times from the SNP that we should introduce gender quotas. I am pleased that my fellow Scottish Conservative colleagues and I are arguing against quotas, which do not help to address the root cause of the issue to do with getting women into work.

Ruth Maguire: Many Scottish Conservative speakers have acknowledged that we all—although it applies to some of us more than others—have a problem with female representation in the Parliament. How long are the Conservatives prepared to wait to have equal representation? How long is it acceptable to wait?

Alexander Burnett: I think that all women would want to be here because of ability. If someone enters a race and 50 per cent of the opposition are removed from that race, that can only diminish their achievements. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have stirred things up a bit, Mr Burnett.

Alison Johnstone: Is the member suggesting that there are far more able men than able women in the Conservative Party? Is he asserting that women are less able than men?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Burnett, be brief.

Alexander Burnett: Absolutely not. The point of my speech, and what many other people have been saying, is that the issue is not about ability but about how we get people to that point. It is the factors in people's lives—mainly in women's lives—before they get to the point of competing to be a candidate for this place that are holding them back. That is not about ability and is not about people in the chamber. It is a question of how we help women to have the opportunity to put themselves in a position to make such a step.

Helping women into work and into positions of power, which is exactly the point, is done by making the playing field as level as possible. It can be as simple as keeping nursery fees down, so that it pays for a mother to return to work. Who knows what women could achieve if they were not being trapped by policy?

The women in Azerbaijan, Russia and the UK who achieved equal political rights did not need a gender quota. Nobody wants to get a job just because they tick a box.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Stewart Stevenson as the last speaker in the open debate.

17:01

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to talk about international women's day. I will say a few words about legislative issues.

We currently have the Great Reform Bill before the Parliament at Westminster. We might remind ourselves that the previous Great Reform Bill, in 1832, removed the right of women to vote. The electorate in those days was very small and there was a property qualification, but women who met that qualification and who were not married or were head of household could vote. That danger exists with the Great Reform Bill today, as it potentially takes away rights and equalities for a wide range of people.

The year 1893 was important in legislative terms. New Zealand, which was the first jurisdiction in the world to allow equal voting for men and women, led the way. In the UK, some progress, but not very much, was made with the passage of the Married Women's Property Act 1893—the fifth such act since 1870—which, for the first time, allowed women to own property in their own right, rather than it being the property of their husbands.

In 1917—in particular, 100 years ago tomorrow—there was a strike and a protest by the women of Russia. The bread and peace strike and protest led, only four days later, to the fall of the czar and then the white Russian revolution, which later in the year led to the red Russian revolution. Women have influenced politics for a long time.

The cabinet secretary referred to Ban Ki-moon. The United Nations Charter, which was adopted in 1945, was the first international agreement that included within it the fundamental principle of equality between men and women. The United Nations is to be commended for its early action on the subject.

On 1 January 1975, the Equal Pay Act came into operation. My wife rejoiced, because that was the first time in her career that she had been able

to enter her company's pension plan. She was in the plan right to the point of her retirement, but the problem of her entering it late affected her pension; it is some 20 per cent lower than it might have been. Even something that happened in 1975 continues to have effects to this day.

My wife, who worked in the finance industry, was pretty much on her own, because there was only one other woman at senior level. She specialised in investment trusts and used to go to the Association of Investment Companies annual dinners, where she was one of only two women among the 300 or 400 people there. She was fortunate that Joe Gormley, then the general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, who was one of the biggest investors as the chair of the miners' pension fund, insisted that my wife always sat next to him—and he always bought the drink. He was a sexist, but that sometimes worked in some people's favour.

I am slightly surprised that members are saying that there are no serious businesspeople, because my wife was a mentor to Audrey Baxter, who is the executive chairman of Baxters Food Group. There are, exceptionally, some women at senior levels in some businesses in Scotland.

On a personal level, I point to my Aunt Daisy, who worked in a munitions factory in the first world war, where she lost one of her fingers in an industrial accident—she was one of very many who did so. Curiously enough, when my mother first voted, she had two votes because she was a university graduate and they got an additional vote.

There are some female heroes whom it is worth having a wee think about. My professional career, which started in the 1960s, was in computers. Ada Lovelace, who was Charles Babbage's programmer in the 1860s and 1870s, was the person who invented—look it up—the algorithmic approach to programming, which underpins the way in which we do things today. However, Rear Admiral Grace Hopper, who programmed the Harvard mark 1 computer in the United States in 1944, was the real founder of the way in which we do programming today. It was because of the bug—that is the American word for a moth—that she found in the computer that, to this day, we use that word for an error in a computer programme.

Tomorrow is daffodil day, and the Marie Curie nurses will have a stand in the Parliament. Marie Curie was the first and only person to win two Nobel prizes in two different scientific disciplines. Is she not a hero to aspire to?

An example of how things were not so good is Steve Shirley, the founder and chief executive of a consultancy company called FI Group in the 1970s. We might think that Steve is a man's

name, and she intended that we think it so, although she is actually called Stephanie. She used the name Steve so that, until she eventually appeared before her clients, they did not know that she was a woman, and she was very successful indeed.

Today, on climate justice—which is a real women's issue—Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland, is leading the way in ensuring that we do the right things.

Fairness for women in no way diminishes men; rather, it rewards all of us in society, because equality for all is a necessary prerequisite of fairness for all.

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

17:08

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): It has been a pleasure to take part in the debate on international women's day and to have a debate conducted mainly by the women in this Parliament, although I thank the men who have joined us on this important day.

We are 52 per cent of the population, and that is a majority—probably the only majority that we will hear about in the debate. As other members have said, Engender has calculated that, at the current rate, it will take 169 years to close the gender gap—that is six or seven generations, depending on how we count it.

No major newspaper editors are women, there are no women chief executive officers in the FTSE 100 companies and, as other members have said, there are pitiful numbers of women in senior positions in our police force. As Monica Lennon said, no black or ethnic minority women have been members of this Parliament and, as I said in a previous debate, lesbian women were not even acknowledged by the law until recent times, when the UK Parliament legislated to equalise the age of consent at 16.

It is a wee bit alarming that some of our sisters across the chamber—for today's purposes, I will call them that—such as Annie Wells are proud of the two women Prime Ministers that we have had. That is fair enough, but they have not attempted to answer Tom Arthur's question about the impact on women of benefit cuts. It will probably be women who will fare worst under Brexit and continuing benefit cuts.

Gillian Martin: Another point that has been on my mind is that the Tories talked about Margaret Thatcher in a proud way as an example of women's achievements, but she promoted only one female MP to her Cabinet in her entire time as Prime Minister.

Pauline McNeill: I know very few feminists who would agree that the fact that a woman is at the top means that we have become emancipated, so I agree with the member's point.

Women have faced prejudice through the ages and, as other members have said, women have paid with their lives when campaigning for the right to vote. It is staggering that women in France did not receive a vote until 1944; and those of us who have watched the movie will know that Saudi Arabia did not have women voting until 2011. We know that internationally, as many members have said, women and girls have faced abhorrent discrimination.

We cannot always legislate such attitudes away and we know that sexism is inherent in societies. I want to address the question of quotas for that reason. Quotas and positive action can enforce important changes that can skip generations. The Scottish Parliament would be poorer if we did not have members such as Gillian Martin and Rachael Hamilton, but Alison Johnstone is right to say that if the quota of female members in the Parliament is left to voluntary action and accident, we will never get there. Only 19 per cent of MSPs in the party in this chamber that is opposed to 50:50 women's representation are women.

Like Gillian Martin in her party, I arrived in this Parliament because the Labour Party had 50:50 representation for women. I was selected, along with Donald Dewar, in 1999. If I had not had the chance to fight for selection for Glasgow Kelvin against seven other women, I would not be here today. It is up to the sisters who believe in the feminist movement to champion change. If the Tory women MSPs think that quotas have no role, are they prepared to wait 169 years for 50:50 representation?

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the member acknowledge that, in the previous session of Parliament, 40 per cent of the Scottish Conservatives' parliamentary party were women?

Pauline McNeill: What has happened since then? I would like to know. Scotland was third in the world for women's political representation. Is it good enough that we are into double figures in that regard? I do not think so.

I will address a point that was made very ably by Ruth Maguire earlier in the debate. She said that there are not enough women in the room. We know that, but most women will say that in every meeting that they go to, they are pretty much always in the minority. There should be no woman or, indeed, man who does not realise that it is men who put up the barriers for women—I am sorry, but that has to be said. That is often why women lose their confidence and think that maybe there is

no future for them in their field. I therefore believe that quotas have their place.

We had an interesting history lesson from Stewart Stevenson, and another such lesson is that in 1819 Mary Anne Evans wrote as George Eliot. However, we have learned only recently that publishers advised our contemporary J K Rowling that young male readers might be deterred by a female author, which is why she adopted the initials that she did.

There have been many firsts for women in history, but I will mention only one. I played football when I was 11 and I also wanted to be a referee, but my father said, "There will never be a woman referee at Celtic park." I believe that there will be, and I praise Kylie McMullan, who made history in 2014 as the first Scottish woman referee—and, yes, any man can challenge me on the offside rule and I will show that I know what it is.

The minister referred in her opening remarks to discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy. That is the area that we must tackle the most. I know of a woman who had a high-risk pregnancy and suffered pregnancy discrimination but could not apply to a tribunal in time to meet the three months' deadline for applications because she had to leave her job before the three months was up. We must recognise that employment law must be appropriate for women in such circumstances. I wonder whether the minister would support having an extension of the three months' application period to six months. The issue is reserved, but the Scottish Parliament could certainly comment on it.

17:15

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I reaffirm our strong commitment to and support for international women's day, which takes place tomorrow, and I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for bringing the debate to the chamber this afternoon.

Gillian Martin and Clare Adamson gave us a lot of important information on what we should do to celebrate women who have made their way in the world, and I am grateful to them for that. Stewart Stevenson did likewise, raising some very important points in one of the history lessons that we traditionally get from him. Alison Johnstone also raised important points. She spoke about the tremendous feats of Laura Muir, and I hope that she, along with other members, will sign the motion that I have lodged to support the remarkable attributes of Laura Muir, who is one of our best female athletes.

As Stewart Stevenson rightly said, we should be celebrating the visitors to the Parliament this

week, who have been showcasing the work of Marie Curie. Stewart Stevenson explained exactly why we should do that. She is a prime example of an inspirational woman on whom we can base our approach to the future. However, whether we think of Marie Curie, Florence Nightingale, Joan of Arc, Emmeline Pankhurst or Eleanor Roosevelt, we must recognise that they were all instrumental in standing up against the orthodoxy of their time and that they all made untold sacrifices in their efforts to change the world for the better. They had that special mix of courage, bravery and a determination to prove that women had a key role to play despite their being in a male-dominated world where they found themselves confronted with so many barriers. In Emmeline Pankhurst's words,

"We have to free half of the human race, the women, so that they can help to free the other half."

Those are wise words indeed if we consider carefully exactly what she meant.

Of course, in those days, the discrimination that women faced was painfully obvious. In today's world, we would have no second thoughts about righting the wrongs. We have come a long way since those days, but that does not mean that we have solved the problem—far from it. Our biggest challenge is to deal with the hidden discrimination that goes unnoticed.

The Scottish Government's motion references research that shows that increasing female leadership and gender equality in the workforce can benefit the workplace, society and the economy. On that note, I am sure that members noticed in yesterday's *Herald* the very interesting interview with Tricia Nelson. Ms Nelson is an equity partner in professional services firm EY's Glasgow office and heads up the transport section alongside her role as the head of talent for the UK advisory division. She is a keen advocate of driving equality and diversity in the workplace, and she believes that addressing issues of gender parity is critical for Scottish businesses, pointing to the empirical evidence on improved financial performance and increased share price in a stronger economy. She noted in the interview that

"the more diverse the team, the better the business outcome",

and I strongly agree with her on that. However, she went on to develop an analysis of the barriers that stand in the way, including what she describes as unconscious bias, which makes the solution all the harder to achieve.

Several members highlighted the gloomy research that the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee has cited during its inquiry into the gender pay gap. As Mary Fee rightly pointed out, we might get somewhere if we wait until 2069.

That is an appalling state of affairs, and we must all be concerned about it.

Clare Adamson: The member has talked about how long things might take to change, and about unconscious bias. However, the research on unconscious bias tells us that there are things that we can do. We can increase the diversity of presenters, invite different people along to speak to us and anonymise recruitment processes. Does she agree that there are things that we can do to tackle that bias?

Liz Smith: Yes—absolutely. Some good suggestions are coming from down south, where the gap, albeit that it still exists, has been reduced over the past few years. The gap has reduced more quickly there than it has in Scotland partially because of some of those groundbreaking new initiatives. The member is absolutely right to highlight them.

I come to the point about gender equality and the 50:50 situation. I hear what members say about that, but I cannot support it—although not because I have any prejudices about special targets and so on. I cannot support it because if we adopt those targets, we will actually prevent some very strong people from coming in on either an all-female list or an all-male list. I worry about that greatly. I understand where members are coming from, but I certainly want a situation in which there is extensive merit. By definition, we will not, through targets—

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

Liz Smith: Yes, of course.

Graham Simpson: I represent Central Scotland for the Conservative Party. I have two colleagues—Alison Harris and Margaret Mitchell—so the region is represented by two females and one male. Does Liz Smith agree that those two very talented females got there entirely on merit and had no requirement at all for any artificial system?

Liz Smith: Yes, absolutely. I agree—and I am sure that Graham Simpson was part of the group who got here on the basis of talent.

If we go for very strict target-based applications, by definition, we will miss out on some people who might have got in because they have the talent to—

Tom Arthur: Will the member take an intervention?

Liz Smith: No. I am in my last minute, am I not, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Yes.

Liz Smith: I will finish, because I am in my last minute and the cabinet secretary wants to speak. I know that some members want the cabinet secretary to deal with specific issues.

When we make those calls, we have to be very clear in our own minds about exactly what the implications are. That is something that I think has tremendous resonance. It applies to job applications, too. If we are going to be politically correct the whole time, we should be aware of some of the consequences.

I am very happy to support the amendment in the name of Annie Wells.

The Presiding Officer: I call Angela Constance to wind up the debate.

17:22

Angela Constance: We have had many varied and interesting speeches this afternoon, ranging from the historical to the more contemporary, and from those that took a very domestic focus to those that had a more international outlook. There have been some personal reflections on our hopes and dreams for our sons and daughters of the future.

I am perhaps the wrong person to agree with Gillian Martin, so I say this with my tongue somewhat in my cheek, but I agree when she says that women politicians should not be reduced to the shoes that they wear.

To Alexander Burnett, all I can say is, “Aye, you are a brave, if perhaps somewhat unwise, man”. It is interesting that no one ever asks whether the men are here on merit.

I agree with Pauline McNeill’s very specific point about employment tribunals and employment law. I would like to do more than express an opinion, and I regret that we do not have free rein over both employment and equality legislation. However, I am pleased that the Government has said that it will not introduce fees for employment tribunals, because what we have seen with such fees is a 75 per cent reduction specifically in pregnancy and maternity cases brought to tribunals—

Pauline McNeill: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angela Constance: Yes.

Pauline McNeill: The cabinet secretary will know that the fees for employment tribunals to which she refers are £250 to make an application, but £900 for a hearing. Obviously, that is an issue that affects men and women, but the fees are absolutely prohibitive.

Angela Constance: Yes, they are. I thank Ms McNeill for that factual point.

Annie Wells said that she has the right to have her voice heard—and she absolutely does. She also said that she and her party have the right to express their opposition to what they call quotas—again, she is right. However, I also have the right—and, I contend, the responsibility—to point to the rights of the women who are missing from positions of power and influence, as aptly identified in the report “Sex and Power in Scotland in 2017”, which Engender published a few days ago.

I give the example of public sector boards. The decisions that the 74 public boards in Scotland make will affect every aspect of our lives. Women’s voices should be heard, and we should be active participants. We know that the evidence on gender balance demonstrates that boards that are balanced or which have more women on them perform better and make better decisions. There is overwhelming international evidence that increasing the participation of women at senior levels on public sector boards, or on private sector boards, is not just the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do.

In a nutshell, the draft Gender Representation on Public Boards Bill is about positive action to redress a current imbalance—the underrepresentation of women. I want to be clear about a few points. Positive action and appointment on merit are not mutually exclusive—let us dispel that myth. According to EU law, positive action can be used only where one gender—in this case, women—is underrepresented, and women can be appointed only on merit. The other myth that we need to dispel is that the situation is somehow one of positive action versus earlier action, systemic action or voluntary action. In fact, we have to take all those actions.

The bill, which we will debate at length in the weeks and months ahead, will do two things. It will set a duty in relation to the objective of achieving 50:50 gender balance, and it will require public sector boards to take action to encourage the underrepresented gender—in this case, women—to apply. There will be no folding of arms or saying, “Ach well, no women applied.” As for Annie Wells’s interests in sanctions, I do not know of any legislation that the Scottish Parliament has passed that has built into it a system of sanctions, but I look forward to any amendments to the bill that she wishes to lodge.

We have to learn from the voluntary approach that has resulted in 45 per cent of public sector non-executive board members now being women. The number is at a record high, and it has been achieved by doing things differently in recruitment

and assessment. However, appointments have always been made on merit. Although 45 per cent of public sector non-executive board members are now women, there is more to do. We need the bill to build on and lock in those gains for the future. Surely the history of Parliament tells us that. We are 18 years into the life of this Parliament, and we are barely climbing back to where we were. Representation of women in the chamber is now at 35 per cent, but it was 37 per cent in 1999 and 40 per cent in 2003. Alison Johnstone made that point well.

Members on the Government benches and I will support the Labour amendment. If Labour does not mind my saying so, it is an excellent amendment that focuses primarily on the gender pay gap. I say to Rachael Hamilton that Scotland outperforms the UK on any measurement of the pay gap, whether of the full-time pay gap, the overall pay gap or the public sector pay gap. We can agree that, no matter what size it is, it is entirely unacceptable that the pay gap exists at all. It is a matter of great sadness to me that the Equal Pay Act 1970 is as old as I am.

We know that the pay gap is driven by the lack of affordable childcare, the experience in the workplace of women aged over 40, pregnancy and maternity discrimination, and occupational segregation. As I hope that I and other members have demonstrated this afternoon, the Scottish Government is taking action on all those areas.

I do not suppose that it will surprise many to hear that members on the Government benches will not support the Tory amendment. It talks about the UK Government’s endeavours to increase women’s equality. With respect, I urge the UK Government to tell the WASPI women who will be demonstrating in Westminster tomorrow about those endeavours. Those women have had to live with shifting goalposts, their retirement plans have been shattered and they have been forced to return to or remain in the workplace.

The second reason why I will not support the Conservative amendment is that the UK Government has ignored key recommendations, made by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee following its inquiry into the gender pay gap, on flexible working, the sharing of unpaid caring responsibilities and supporting women over 40 back into the workplace.

The third and probably main reason why I and other members will not support the Tory amendment relates to the impact on women of austerity and social security cuts. Women are twice as dependent on social security as men are, from work that was done by the UK Women’s Budget Group, we know that the cumulative spending cuts and tax increases from 2010 amount to £16 billion and that £12 billion of the

total—75 per cent—has come directly from the pockets of women.

Rachael Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention?

Angela Constance: No, because the member didnae oblige me.

The Child Poverty Action Group has highlighted that the cuts to the working allowance for universal credit will mean that a single parent who is already working full time and who is paid the national living wage will have to work 46 extra days each year, and we all know that 92 per cent of lone parents are women.

Ruth Maguire and Pauline McNeill, among others, made the point that having a woman Prime Minister, a woman First Minister and a gender-balanced Cabinet does not mean, by any stretch of the imagination, that the glass ceiling has been shattered. However, I am confident about one thing: Scotland's first woman First Minister will do far more to advance the equality of women and girls in this country than the UK's first woman Prime Minister.

Point of Order

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

During this afternoon's ministerial statement on named persons, Monica Lennon asked the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills a question relating to council finances. Monica Lennon is a sitting councillor on South Lanarkshire Council, which she failed to disclose when asking the question, despite its being on her register of interests. I believe that Monica Lennon has breached section 3.1.4 of "The Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament", so I seek the Presiding Officer's view on that.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I thank Ms Haughey for her point of order. It is entirely up to each individual member to decide whether an interest is declarable. Without commenting further on the point of order, I am aware that some members—including members of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee—are concerned about the application of that rule, so I thought that it might be helpful to provide some clarification for members.

If a member has a registrable interest in a matter, they must declare that before taking part in any parliamentary proceedings that relate to that matter. That is a requirement of "The Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament" and the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006. Each member has to judge whether an interest is sufficiently relevant to particular proceedings to require a declaration. As Presiding Officer, it is not my role to determine whether a member should have declared an interest. Instead, complaints about whether members have followed the rules about declaring interests are initially investigated by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland.

If Miss Haughey, or any other member, wishes to pursue the matter further, the clerks to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee will be able to advise on the most appropriate course of action. I hope that that has been helpful.

Decision Time

17:34

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S5M-04440.1, in the name of Annie Wells, which seeks to amend motion S5M-04440, in the name of Angela Constance, on international women's day, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)

Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 27, Against 81, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-04440.2, in the name of Monica Lennon, which seeks to amend motion S5M-04440, in the name of Angela Constance, on

international women's day, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 82, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-0440, in the name of Angela Constance, on international women's day, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)

Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 82, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament unites, ahead of UN International Women's Day on 8 March 2017, to reaffirm its commitment to upholding and protecting the rights of women, which are fundamental human rights; welcomes this year's theme, Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030, which seeks to ensure that women are empowered to take up the opportunities of work and ensure that the barriers to women entering and progressing in the workplace at all levels and in all sectors are addressed; notes the work of the Scottish Government to ensure and increase equality in the workplace; regrets that the gender pay gap means that women earn significantly less than men, which over the course of a working life is likely to represent hundreds of thousands of pounds of lost income, impacting pension contributions and the ability to save; acknowledges that women remain under-represented in senior roles across politics, business, the public sector, the media, culture and sport, with 73% of leadership roles in Scotland held by men; recognises the Engender report, Sex and Power in Scotland 2017, which lays bare these statistics; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to a bill on gender representation on public boards; agrees that the lack of progress towards gender equality in the Parliament, councils and public boards is unacceptable; commends the Women 50:50 campaign and its evidenced-based call for legislative gender quotas.

Local Government Finance (Debt Amnesty)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a member's business debate on motion S5M-02900, in the name of Alex Rowley, on "Local Government Finance and the State of the Debt". The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the work of Unite the Union Scotland in producing its paper, *Local Government Finance and the State of the Debt*; understands that the paper estimates that Scotland's local authorities, which includes Fife Council, have around £2.4 billion of pre-Scottish devolution debt liabilities owed to the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), with an average rate of return of 8%; further understands that post-devolution interest rates paid to PWLB are only around half this; notes that pre-devolution interest rates were not independently set by the Bank of England but by the then UK Government; believes that there is a growing consensus regarding the need for action to tackle local authority debt owed to PWLB; considers that Scottish devolution was intended to be a new beginning for Scotland, and notes the view that the time has come for this historic financial burden to be dropped by the UK Government.

17:39

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I begin by thanking members of the Scottish Parliament who signed my motion on "Local Government Finance and the State of the Debt" so that we could have the debate this evening.

I also record my thanks to Unite the union in Scotland for all the work that it has done around the issue, and to Unite's membership, who have campaigned up and down Scotland to raise awareness of the arguments around debt amnesty for public services. A few Unite members are in the gallery this evening and they are very welcome.

In speaking to the motion, I aim to raise further awareness of the campaign for a debt amnesty on pre-devolution council debt. I also hope that we can build consensus in Scotland on the issues on which this Parliament can put pressure on the United Kingdom Treasury in Whitehall to agree a debt amnesty on pre-devolution council debts for Scottish local government.

I hope to gain the support of the Scottish Government for the campaign, and the agreement of the Scottish Government that it will make representations to the UK Treasury for an amnesty for all pre-devolution debt that is owed by councils.

There are two broad reasons for making the claim on the UK Treasury. The first and key reason for putting the case to the UK Treasury must be fairness. Some £2.5 billion of Scottish

council debt that is owed to the UK Treasury's Public Works Loan Board dates back to pre-devolution. Interest rates on those pre-devolution debts are about 8 per cent, but interest rates on post-devolution debts are about 4 per cent, which is the standard rate for a 30-year PWLB loan. That means that Scottish residents are paying 50 per cent more interest on pre-devolution debt to the UK Treasury than we are on post-devolution debt. It means that, on average, Scottish local government is spending the equivalent of 44p in every £1 of council tax that is collected from Scottish residents on servicing debt liabilities. Unite estimates that, of that, 10p in every £1 derives from outstanding pre-devolution liabilities.

In the 17 years since devolution, Scottish councils have sent back a minimum of £3.3 billion to the Treasury in interest payments on pre-devolution debt liabilities alone. I suggest that we have a strong case for pursuing an amnesty on the ground of fairness. I hope that Parliament and the Government in Scotland will join the campaign and make the case to the UK Government for that to happen. There is a strong case to be put to the Treasury based on what is fair, right and just, and we need to make that case.

We must also consider the current financial pressures on Scottish councils and the growing demands that are being placed on public services, which makes the need for agreement to a debt amnesty even more crucial.

A report that was published today by the Accounts Commission makes for very difficult reading and brings home the case for reform and investment. The chair of the Accounts Commission states that

"Councils are increasingly relying on the use of reserves to bridge projected funding gaps."

Moreover, he states that there is

"a dependency on incremental changes to services, increasing charges and reducing employee numbers in order to make savings. These are neither sufficient nor sustainable solutions for the scale of the challenge facing councils."

We need to support councils to face up to those challenges, which means stopping the cuts and investing in a more preventive approach, which the Christie commission, supported by all parties in Parliament, advocated.

Pat Rafferty, who is the secretary of Unite the union in Scotland, best sums up the current position of local government in Scotland. He has stated that we are

"Without doubt ... facing a perfect storm of austerity across Scottish local authorities and, left unchecked, thousands of crucial jobs and local services will be further decimated to the point of no return."

We believe these extraordinary circumstances call for special measures and that's why we are pursuing an amnesty on the pre-devolution debts owed by our councils to the UK Treasury.

An amnesty is a matter of political will and there is certainly precedence, as witnessed by the UK Treasury write-off of a £900 million housing debt in Glasgow City Council—it can be done.”

That is a key point in this debate—“it can be done”. It just requires the political will to make it happen. That is why the debate is important.

As Unite says, a debt amnesty is not the whole solution to the massive challenges that are facing local councils, but would be one of a series of measures that need to be taken to address the financial pressures that councils are under so that we can sustain jobs and services in public ownership for future generations.

I wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Scotland on the issue and got a reply from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that basically said no, and Mr Mundell did not bother to reply—so, we know their position. However, councils across the UK have been renegotiating debt and interest rates and making massive savings with private lenders, so the idea that the UK Treasury cannot do that is fanciful. Let us firm up our position and our resolve to fight the case for a debt amnesty on the grounds that I have set out.

17:46

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank Alex Rowley for bringing this debate to the chamber. It is on a subject that not only I but many people, elected and unelected, are very interested in. Mr Rowley's motion refers to

“around £2.4 billion of pre-Scottish devolution debt liabilities”

and, in the last clause, says that the Parliament

“considers that Scottish devolution was intended to be a new beginning for Scotland, and notes the view that the time has come for this historic financial burden to be dropped by the UK Government”.

I agree entirely with what Mr Rowley says, but I think that we have to be perfectly honest in this debate; I remind Mr Rowley that it was a Labour Government that was there at that particular time, and not just before devolution. When devolution came in, why was that never, ever suggested under a Labour Administration? When there was a Labour Government in Westminster, why was it never raised then?

That is something that I have to ask. I am not saying that I am cynical, but we need to ask that. Further on, it was a Labour Government that brought in the private finance initiative, which is costing even more money. I appreciate what Mr

Rowley is saying and absolutely agree about the debt, but I have to ask why now, at this particular time—

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Sandra White: If you will just let me finish, Mr Findlay—I am going to quote you as well.

Why, when a Labour Government was there and when, as Mr Rowley mentioned, it was a Labour Government that wrote off the historical housing debt of Glasgow City Council, and transferred the houses to Glasgow Housing Association, which was unaccountable not just to the council but to people whose houses were there as well, was the debt not written off then? Gordon Brown wrote off the housing debt, and the debt could have been written off then. Why was the Labour Government not asked to write off the debt when it wrote off that housing debt? I have to ask that question.

Mr Rowley thanks Unite the union and I absolutely thank it as well. I have been on the picket line with some of the people in Glasgow, who I know, about writing off the debt. I also thank Unison for its briefing, which I will quote from. The briefing refers to public-private partnerships and PFI as an “expensive form of borrowing”—a very expensive form of borrowing. Mr Findlay is also quoted in that same briefing from Unison. He said then:

“It would be financial madness to buy a house on a credit card yet that is exactly what we are doing with PFI and NPD. In some cases—”

Neil Findlay rose—

Sandra White: I will let you in in a second.

“In some cases we are paying double digit interest rates on some existing PFI projects”.

Why did Labour bring in PFI projects and why did you not ask a Labour Government in Westminster or a Labour Government here to write off the debt?

Neil Findlay: The member mentioned what I said about PFI and non-profit-distributing debt. NPD is the Scottish Government's scheme, which is PFI by another name. I believe that, irrespective of which Government was in power, we now have a unique opportunity, because borrowing powers are coming to this Parliament and we have historically low interest rates. We have a unique opportunity—we will not have an on-going opportunity—to renegotiate these debts, whether they are historical debts or current NPD debts. We should take that opportunity now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No more than one minute more, Ms White.

Sandra White: As I said, I appreciate the motion as it stands, but I must still ask why Scottish Labour did not ask the UK Government to write off the debt when there was a Labour Government in Westminster and in Scotland. As Alex Rowley said, the Government wrote off the council housing debt in Glasgow—

Neil Findlay: You opposed it.

Sandra White: It was possible to do it in that case, so why could it not do it for other debts?

Neil Findlay: You opposed it.

Sandra White: No, no—your party was in power, and you never wrote to it or asked it to write off the debt. Gordon Brown was in power at that time, yet the Government did not write off the debt. You might call me cynical, but I would like us—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members should speak through the chair, and should do so only when asked, rather than having an individual argument.

Sandra White: I apologise, Presiding Officer; I did not realise that I was doing that.

As I said, I think that this is a good debate to have. However, I do not understand why the debt could not have been written off when Labour was in power at Westminster and here and why, all of a sudden—apparently because of low interest rates—we are now being asked to take this on board.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Well, we have got off to a very consensual start.

17:51

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I hope not to take up too much of your time today, Presiding Officer.

I thank Alex Rowley for bringing this debate to the chamber. Local government finance is always worth discussing and I share his view on that. It is certainly in the news today, as Alex Rowley pointed out. Further, we have seen the timely Accounts Commission report, “Local government in Scotland: Performance and challenges 2017”, which demonstrated what most of us in this chamber realise, which is that local government in Scotland has been squeezed over many years. We have seen a long-term decline in revenue funding under the Scottish National Party. In the next year, total revenue funding will fall by £260 million in real terms, as that report shows. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities says that there has been a £550 million cut in the local government settlement, and it calls for longer-term planning.

Of course, all that has an effect on jobs and services, and more than 15,000 full-time equivalent jobs have been lost in local government in the past five years. It is pretty depressing.

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Does Mr Simpson accept that, by 2019-20, the Scottish Government’s discretionary budget will have been cut by £2.9 billion since 2010-11? That is 9.2 per cent lower in real terms. His Government is slashing our budget. Does he not realise that that has an effect on every public service in Scotland?

Graham Simpson: That was more of a speech than a question. In any case, its premise was entirely wrong, because, as the Fraser of Allander institute has pointed out—and as Derek Mackay’s figures show—there has been an increase this year in money coming from the UK Government. That is why my colleague Murdo Fraser has described Mr Mackay as a very lucky man. He is indeed, yet still he has chosen to cut local government funding.

The thrust of what Alex Rowley is asking us to consider concerns historical debt. However, there is a bit of a contradiction between Alex Rowley’s motion and what Unite calls for in its paper, which I have read and found interesting. It seems to me that the paper is calling for an amnesty on the interest, but Alex Rowley appears to want the debt to be written off entirely. His motion does not mention an amnesty on interest. I am not really clear where he is coming from. It would certainly be irresponsible for us to call for £2.4 billion of debt to be written off on the day before the UK budget. Perhaps that answers Sandra White’s point.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): Does Graham Simpson recognise that Unite Scotland is also asking for the reprofiling of the debt? As a fiscally conservative Conservative, does he accept the merits of using the fact that interest rates are at an all-time low to save Government and local government money? Surely a fiscally conservative Conservative can support that.

Graham Simpson: I am merely trying to get the Labour story straight in my head, because I am not really clear where Labour is coming from. If Labour is asking for £2.4 billion of debt to be written off, that strikes me as somewhat irresponsible; if it is asking for an amnesty on interest, that is an entirely different matter.

Alex Rowley may want to act like a Labour chancellor, but we will certainly not play that game. I have checked with COSLA. It has made no representations on the matter at all, although it has some sympathy, of course. If any representations are to be made to the UK Government, COSLA is probably the group to

make them. I note that Alex Rowley has made representations himself. He should probably use the Scottish Government if it is so minded. It is certainly necessary to ask first, but we need to be clear what Alex Rowley is calling for.

17:56

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I thank Alex Rowley for bringing the debate to the chamber because, like me, he is a former councillor, and we have probably heard debates about funding in local authorities more often than both of us care to remember. When I listened to my colleague Sandra White, I thought that an important point is that the debate sounds like one that we had in pre-devolution days. There is merit in what we are discussing. There is merit in the idea that we have to talk to Westminster and ensure that we get something out of the situation.

At the heart of the debate is the key point that local government has financial autonomy. That must continue but, for it to do so, we need to ensure that Westminster, as the body that gave the loan, does something. I have concerns about that.

Local councils must be held accountable and allowed to pay off their debts, but they should get a bit of flexibility. Unite's report shows some of the historical debt. For Renfrewshire Council, which covers my area, the pre-devolution figure is £97 million and, post-devolution, it is £165 million. As former councillors in the chamber will be aware, there is a point at which an officer usually says, "We do not have the capacity for that project, councillor. We do not have the funding capability to do it because you are carrying this debt." That is similar to what Sandra White said on housing. For years, councils carried debt for houses that, in some cases, had already been knocked down.

It is important that councils get flexibility. I welcome everything in the motion, but only the lender of the loan can write off the debt, so we would have to appeal to the UK Government's better nature. Given all the issues that we currently face with Westminster at the helm, that is quite a difficult ask. As a former car salesman, I believe in negotiation, and I think that we could probably find common ground somewhere on the issues. However, if we do not get it right, it will hit our poorest areas because if, for the sake of argument, we ended up with the Scottish Government trying to find a way to have an amnesty of its own, that would affect the budget that we have already settled with local government.

My concerns are about Westminster. Members might call me a cynic, but I have no doubt that any plea to Westminster to write off pre-devolution

debts would be met with ridiculous terms and conditions, and an amnesty could require the Scottish Government to reduce its budget dramatically, which would devastate agreements that have already been made. Should Westminster not be more agreeable, further cuts to offset council debts could affect the £120 million extra that has already gone to local government.

Any change to the debt would have to be dealt with carefully, and that is my biggest concern. When we do the negotiations, we need to deal with that. It is important for us to have the debate with local government and Westminster, because the issue affects the delivery of the services that everybody in our constituencies and communities uses.

Although it is extremely important for us to have the debate, we need to explore all the options and to do so in a non-confrontational manner. From listening to Mr Simpson's remarks, I thought that it sounded as if the Tories at Westminster do not want to have an open debate.

Mr Rowley stated that he has ideas, and the Scottish Government has ideas, but we need to ensure that Westminster buys into the debate. If we do not get it right, we will cause more chaos and more financial troubles for our local authorities, and none of us wants that. Let us have the open and frank discussion, and let us see whether there is the capacity for us to do something about the issue.

18:00

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As I am still a serving councillor with Perth and Kinross Council, I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I thank Alex Rowley for securing this debate on the debt that local authorities in Scotland owe. I might not agree with all the conclusions that are in the paper that Unite the Union Scotland published, but I acknowledge that it makes a strong case that many councils face serious challenges in funding their public services. As a councillor, I have seen that in full.

The £2.4 billion of pre-devolution debt that is owed to the Public Works Loan Board is a not insignificant amount of money, but the total debt that Scotland's local authorities have accrued is about £13.6 billion. That has contributed to making local government debt per household in Scotland almost twice the figure for England and Wales.

However, the greatest financial pressures that our local authorities face result from the lack of sufficient funding from the Scottish Government, which has made it necessary for councils to borrow more. Audit Scotland revealed that local government has suffered a 10 per cent real-terms

cut in funding since 2010-11. That is the real challenge that local authorities face, which the Accounts Commission has recognised.

Kevin Stewart: Will Mr Stewart recognise that the reduction in local government funding is about the same as the reduction in the Scottish budget overall, which is thanks to numerous Tory chancellors, who have slashed Scotland's budget by £9.2 billion up to 2019-20? Do you recognise the effect of your chancellor's actions on the budgetary position that we are in?

Alexander Stewart: Mr Stewart, as you have heard many times before from our benches, we know, and you also know, that there has been an increase in funding.

Kevin Stewart: That is not true.

Alexander Stewart: I am sorry, but it is true. You are in a better position today than you have ever been, because of the Barnett consequentials and all the rest of it. You are the people who have attacked local government in Scotland while you have been in charge for the past 10 years.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to speak through the chair.

Alexander Stewart: The Accounts Commission's report makes it clear that the decisions of the SNP and Labour to raise council tax in some areas by up to 3 per cent will "have a limited impact" on council resources. It is worth bearing it in mind that the debts of the 32 local authorities across Scotland range from about half to more than one and a half times each council's annual income.

Different councils have different ways of dealing with the challenges, and we have seen that in savings and reorganisation. Councils can benefit by learning from one another through examples of best practice. Audit Scotland has stated that only a handful of councils have a rating of strong financial management, which speaks volumes about the number of councils that do not have strong financial management and the difficulties that they face. I have said that councils can learn from one another. However, efficiencies, savings and workforce management planning can only go so far before the resources are depleted and we need to take extreme measures.

At a time when our councils are facing increasing pressure with an ageing population, and as their workloads increase, we need to do all that we can to adequately fund councils and allow them to continue to provide high-quality public services without the need for significant borrowing. The Scottish Government urgently needs to rethink its approach to local government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will let the minister come back to his seat and perhaps apologise to us for having left the chamber.

Kevin Stewart: I apologise, Presiding Officer.

18:05

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I declare an interest as a member of Unite the union.

I was a councillor for nine years, and I have seen at close quarters local government's capacity to change people's lives for the better. It breaks my heart to see what is being done to our councils, and I am thoroughly depressed as a result of some of the contributions that I have heard.

Unite the union has done a very good piece of work and has exposed an 8.5 per cent cut in council budgets over the past six years alone. We have to remember that those cuts impact on the services that civilise our society, educate our kids, care for our elderly and keep our communities safe and clean. That is what local government is all about. If we combine that with retention of a regressive system of local taxation, we see real tragedy—I use that word advisedly—occurring because local government is in the front line of the fight against poverty and inequality in our communities.

Councils have lost tens of thousands of jobs, but there has been no task force and there have been no emergency debates or talks of crises from the Government; there has just been denial, and jobs have been lost hand over fist as services have been cut. My local authority in West Lothian has been starved of £90 million. Similarly, there have been large cuts in Midlothian. There have been even worse cuts in Edinburgh and large cuts in every other council area in Scotland. On top of that, the UK Government is ripping councils off with high interest rates on historical debt.

I say to Ms White that I do not care whether the Government is red, blue, yellow or whatever; I would raise this issue with it, because it is fundamental to the proper running of local government.

Sandra White: On what I was trying to get across, you were a local councillor and people were elected. Why did you not ask the Labour Government that was in power here to write off the debt or the interest rate?

Neil Findlay: You have made the assumption—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will members please remember to speak through the chair? Members should also wait until their name has been called before they start to talk again.

Sit down, please, Ms White. I call Mr Findlay.

Neil Findlay: I am sorry, Presiding Officer.

Ms White has made the assumption that we did not lobby to do those things when Labour was in power. She is wrong about that; the issue has been on the agenda for many years and has not just now come to our attention.

As I was saying, on top of the cuts to local government, the UK Government is ripping off councils through historical debt. I do not know anyone who currently receives 8 per cent interest on their bank account balance. Maybe Mr Simpson—and some of the people who manage his finances—does through his expansive portfolio of shares in whatever, but I do not know any normal person who gets 8 per cent interest.

Graham Simpson: Will the member take an intervention?

Neil Findlay: Okay. Hurry up.

Graham Simpson: Mr Findlay has no idea whatsoever about my personal finances. I do not have a vast portfolio of shares. Perhaps he would like to retract what he said.

Can Mr Findlay be any clearer than Mr Rowley was? Is Labour asking for a total write-off of £2.4 billion or is it backing Unite in calling for a debt-interest amnesty? Those are two very different things.

Neil Findlay: I withdraw what I said and apologise for it.

If Mr Simpson is saying that he will support us in getting rid of the interest rate part of the debt, let us go for that as a starter. If he wants to join us and call for the eradication of all the debt, I will be quite happy with that, as well. Let us put hands across the chamber and join on whatever Mr Simpson wants to get rid of so that we can sign a letter and send it off to the UK Treasury today. I am sure that Mr Simpson will be the first out with his pen.

There is also a case for us to look not just at this debt, but at the private finance initiative and non-profit distributing debt that Sandra White mentioned—the past PFI debt and the current NPD debt—irrespective of which Government accumulated that debt.

We currently have historically low interest rates and we are getting borrowing powers for the first time. There is an opportunity to renegotiate the debts. There are examples from England in which doing that has freed up tens of millions of pounds for public services.

My plea to the minister is to ask why we are not doing that, too. We should be setting up a debt recovery unit in the Scottish Government and looking at NPD and PFI debts case-by-case—and not taking a blanket approach—to see whether

they can be renegotiated to free up more money for local government. Imagine what the two things combined would do for the finances of education and social work, our local environment and for rebuilding the services that are being cut year in and year out in our communities.

18:10

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): I, too, thank Alex Rowley for initiating this important debate. I also welcome Unite's report "Local Government Finance and the State of the Debt" and agree with the case for a debt-interest amnesty.

I will stress two main points. The first is to ask why we should limit action to pre-devolution Public Works Loan Board debt; the second is to talk about public debt in an age of austerity and the consequences of an amnesty.

In the report "Local Government Debt in Scotland—report for the Green MSPs", which the Scottish Green Party published in November 2016, a month before Unite's report, we identified total debts of £11.5 billion. At £12.1 billion, Unite's figure is much the same.

There are three elements to the long-term debt: pre-devolution Public Works Loan Board debt; post-devolution Public Works Loan Board debt; and things called LOBOs, which I will come to in a second.

Of the £9 billion Public Works Loan Board debt, about 20 per cent—£2.4 billion—is pre-devolution debt and 80 per cent is post-devolution debt. A further £2.4 billion of debt, which we identified in our November 2016 report, is lender option, borrower option loans—so-called LOBOs. Those are long-term loans—often lasting 40 to 70 years—that were initially offered on teaser fixed rates that typically undercut PWLB rates. In the 2010 spending review, Public Works Loan Board rates rose from 0.15 to 1.0 per cent and were then reduced to 0.8 per cent following the 2012 budget. LOBOs appeared just as the PWLB rates were being hiked. It would be instructive to delve deeper into that coincidence, because today some councils are facing 7 to 9 per cent interest rates on LOBOs. Greens regard LOBOs as illegitimate, odious and unsustainable—it is not even clear how much is being paid in debt. The issue is not just about LOBOs, but about post-devolution PWLB debt.

In 2015-16, Scottish local authorities paid almost £1 billion in interest to the Public Works Loan Board. Unite is proposing an amnesty for only 20 per cent of that figure. In our report, we suggest that there is a strong argument for writing off all post-devolution debt—PWLB debt and LOBOs. I do not know why, if the case can be

made—and it can—for pre-devolution debt, the same case does not exist for post-devolution debt.

Much of the debate is a consequence of the age of austerity—it is a consequence of the fact that the Government bailed out the banks to the tune of hundreds of billions of pounds following the financial crash.

As we saw from the Accounts Commission report that was published this morning, local authorities face a very challenging few years ahead. Debt issued by the PWLB is owned by the UK Government; it is public debt. Debt forgiveness costs the Government nothing, because the debt cost the Government nothing to issue. Therefore, there is a case for going beyond an amnesty and writing off all the debt. In contrast to what Sandra White talked about in relation to previous Labour Governments, this moment is significant, because we are living in austerity and the real challenges that local government faces. There is a clear moral, economic and political case for writing off all the debt. However, I am left with a question: why is Unite's focus only on pre-devolution debt? As I said, it would cost the Treasury nothing to write off the debt, and doing so would improve local government's balance sheet by £9 billion and its revenues by hundreds of millions of pounds a year.

Debt is an important issue. Other important issues are the future of local taxation, the need to scrap the regressive council tax and the future of local government finance as a whole. Later this week, the Greens will publish proposals on how to strengthen the local government financial settlement.

It is clear that we, Unite and Labour agree on debt forgiveness. However, we argue that we should go much further.

18:15

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): I welcome the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Government to today's motion on local government finance and the state of the debt.

The motion asks the Parliament to agree that

“Scottish devolution was intended to be a new beginning for Scotland”,

and to note

“the view that the time has come for this historic financial burden to be dropped by the UK Government.”

Since the motion was lodged, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution has announced—on 2 February—that local authorities will benefit from additional investment of £160 million to support local services. If we take next

year's local government finance settlement and include the extra £160 million and the other sources of income that are available to councils through reforms, the setting of council tax and health and social care integration funding, the overall potential increase in spending power to support local authority services amounts to more than £383 million, or 3.7 per cent, in 2017-18 compared with this year. That is despite the Tory austerity to which Tory members are unwilling to admit. In the debate, Tory members failed to say that, as the Fraser of Allander institute has pointed out, there is a difference between discretionary spend and spending over which we have no control.

I turn to some of the detail in the various reports on the issue. I read with interest the Unite paper, “Local Government Finance and the State of the Debt”. I have listened to the debate, and I thank Mr Rowley for bringing the matter to Parliament for discussion. I am happy to support the terms of his motion. Of course I would welcome an amnesty on pre-devolution debt or even a write-off of the whole amount, as that would free up resources to support investment in the services that our local government partners deliver.

However, we need to be mindful of the likely UK Government reaction to such a request. I do not think that it would be particularly favourable. If we thought that there was any prospect of securing some concession from the current UK Government, we would have no hesitation in making an approach. I think that all members know, sadly, that the reality is that there would be a very negative reaction from the UK Government, for reasons that I will develop.

The Unite report makes a number of relevant points, on which I want to reflect. First, the report notes that the pre-devolution debt is unique, as it carries, at 8 per cent, such a high interest rate. Unite compares that with the current rate of 4.4 per cent that the UK Government charges on loans from the Public Works Loans Board. The pre-devolution period was a time of high interest rates. Members can probably all remember the 1980s and early 1990s, when interest rates rose to nearly 15 per cent. Although the pre-devolution debt is unique, given that average rate of 8 per cent, devolution came at a time when rates were falling—a trend that has continued.

I suspect that HM Treasury would inevitably attempt to argue that to be able to lend to local authorities central Government itself needs to borrow at the prevailing rate. It would say that comparing rates from the late 1990s, when interest rates were higher, with current interest rates, which are at an all-time low, is not relevant when we consider pre-devolution debt.

Analysis shows that nearly half the total outstanding pre-devolution debt of £2.5 billion was borrowed in 1997 and 1998—that is, immediately prior to devolution.

Further, 99 per cent of the pre-devolution debts are interest-only loans. I would expect the Treasury to argue that that means that local authorities have not made any repayments on those loans since they took them out prior to devolution, and they will not repay any amounts until the maturity date of the loans. Borrowing on those terms was a decision that was taken by each local authority at the time. We also have to bear in mind that, had the councils chosen to borrow on a repayment method, the value of the outstanding debt and the associated interest costs would now be lower.

Local authorities have had borrowing powers for a significant number of years, and borrowing decisions are rightly made by each local authority, as Mr Adam pointed out. Central Government does not require them to borrow; it is a decision that they take for themselves. Of course, they employ professionally qualified staff and often use professional Treasury advisers to manage and advise on their Treasury management strategies.

Neil Findlay: I thank the minister for letting me in at the last minute. Let me summarise what he is saying. First, he does not think that the UK Government is going to do anything so he is not going to speak to it, and, secondly, it is all local government's fault for negotiating bad deals in the first place. Does that summarise what he has said so far?

Kevin Stewart: If Mr Findlay listens to the conclusion of my speech, he will find out exactly what I am saying, just as he would have done if he had listened to the beginning of it.

To go back to Treasury management strategies, the types of loan and the period of any loan are, therefore, rightly all matters for each local authority.

It is important to say that, by providing this analysis, I am not in any way defending the debt costs that are associated with the pre-devolution debt. I am simply pointing out the reality of the likely stance that the UK Government would take. I too would whole-heartedly support any moves that would deliver a reduction in those costs if such a reduction were possible.

I also believe that, even if the UK Government was minded to offer any concession, that would not come without catches. I would expect it to say that it would be up to the Scottish Government to provide an off-setting reduction to our budget. That would remove much-needed resources at the very time when the UK Government has already imposed cuts to our budget that will mean that, by

2019-20, the Scottish Government's discretionary budget will be £2.9 billion, which is 9.2 per cent lower in real terms than it was in 2010-11.

To conclude, although I too would like to see an amnesty for—or a write-off of—pre-devolution debt costs, for the reasons that I have outlined, I cannot see the UK Government agreeing. I wish things were different.

Meeting closed at 18:23.

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