



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Tuesday 21 March 2017**

**Session 5**



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 21 March 2017*

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Good afternoon. Our first item of business is time for reflection, for which our leader is Gordon MacRae, the chief executive of the Humanist Society Scotland.

**Mr Gordon MacRae (Humanist Society Scotland):** Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I quote:

“Do not unto another that you would not have him do unto you. Thou needest this law alone. It is the foundation of all the rest.”

That was the teaching of Confucius in 500 BC. From the Greek philosophers of the following 400 years, to first nation thinkers in Australia, right up to the Abrahamic religions of more recent years, this—the golden rule—has prevailed.

I find it fascinating that, wherever we go on the planet, that common basic ethic of reciprocity manifests itself in nearly every human society. Communities that have never seen people with a different colour of skin, tribes and clans separated by vast mountains and dark oceans, people of faith and of none—each arrived at the same conclusion that you should treat others how you want to be treated.

The golden rule inspires me as a humanist because it is universal, because it is the product of lived human experiences over many millennia and because it requires me to think about others and their feelings. The golden rule is the clear default position for moral decision making the world over. It is shared by all and owned by no one; it is truly universal.

That is also what inspires me about this place. You all share a universal, mutual objective—no matter the colour of your rosette—to make life better for the people who put you here. You have the opportunity to shape lives, to create change and to recast society for the better. You may pull in different directions, but you each share a vision that we can build a better society.

Of course, that vision is best forged in the heat of debate. Politics should be about difference and the battle of ideas, but you, the politicians, can be

about what unites us. You can inspire change by appealing to our common good.

Confucius held up the golden rule as the only law that anyone ever truly needed. Now, things really would get quiet in here if that were the case, but it can be the foundation for how our laws are approached.

There are nearly as many versions of the golden rule as there are societies in the world. I hope that you will find the one that speaks most strongly to you. I find that the humanist perspective does it for me: “One world, one life, one humanity.”

## Business Motion

14:02

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-04763, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a revised business programme for today and tomorrow.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Tuesday 21 March 2017—

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time

(b) Wednesday 22 March 2017—

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

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

*Motion agreed to.*

## Independence Referendum

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-04710, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on Scotland's choice.

14:03

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The decision to seek Parliament's authority to begin the process towards an independence referendum is not one that I have reached lightly. It is therefore important to set out why we have arrived at this point and, in light of the significant change facing our country, to reflect on the importance of giving the people of Scotland a democratic choice over our future.

As a result of the Brexit vote, we know that change is now inevitable. The question is, what kind of change is right for Scotland and should that be decided for us or by us? In the past two years or so, the Scottish Government has made a number of proposals that were designed to protect Scotland from the impact of Brexit. It is important to note that had any one of those proposals been accepted by the United Kingdom Government, we would not be having this debate today.

Early on, we recognised the risks to Scotland from the European Union referendum so, before it even took place, we proposed that Brexit should be possible only if all four UK nations voted to leave. Such a provision—which is relatively common in federal countries such as Australia and Canada—would, in this context, have recognised the reality of the UK as a multinational not a unitary state. That proposal was rejected.

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** Does the First Minister recognise that the country is entirely divided down the middle? It is the job of the First Minister, surely, to heal those divisions rather than to make them worse.

**The First Minister:** I believe very strongly that where there is a difference of opinion about the best way forward, the best thing to do is to allow people to choose the best way forward. *[Interruption.]*

As a result of that proposal being rejected, although Scotland voted by 62 per cent to 38 per cent to stay within the European Union, we now face being taken out of the EU against our will, with massive implications for our economy, our society and our place in the world.

Contrary to the promises that were made by the no campaign before the 2014 independence referendum, staying in the UK has not safeguarded Scotland's relationship with Europe; it has jeopardised it. Before last year's elections to

this Parliament, the Scottish National Party manifesto took account of that possibility and said this:

“the Scottish Parliament should have the right to hold another referendum ... if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014, such as Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will.”

It is worth being clear: that manifesto commitment, combined with the result of the Scottish election—which returned a pro-independence majority to this Parliament—and the outcome of the EU referendum, gives the Scottish Government an unquestionable democratic mandate for an independence referendum.

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Will the First Minister take an intervention?

**The First Minister:** Let me make some progress—I will take an intervention shortly.

There is an important point here for those who seek to question that mandate. To suggest that an emphatic election victory, on the basis of a clear manifesto commitment, and a parliamentary majority on an issue do not provide a mandate begs the question of what does and runs the real risk of undermining the democratic process.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I am grateful to the First Minister for taking an intervention. I know that she will acknowledge that at that election, her party lost its overall parliamentary majority. *[Interruption.]* If we are talking about mandates, that is an important point to make.

Can the First Minister tell us what assessment she has made of the Scottish people’s view of and appetite for the kind of referendum that she proposed last Monday?

**The First Minister:** We won the election on the basis of that proposition. The vote that will take place in this Parliament tomorrow evening will demonstrate clearly whether there is a majority in this Parliament for that proposition. Notwithstanding the mandate that we have—

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Will the First Minister give way?

**The First Minister:** I want to make some progress.

Notwithstanding our clear mandate, the Scottish Government did not seek a referendum on independence immediately after the EU vote; instead, we tried to find common ground with the UK Government.

**Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):** Will the First Minister give way?

**The First Minister:** I want to make some progress. *[Interruption.]* Okay, I will take an intervention.

**Ruth Davidson:** On the point that the First Minister raises, were my ears deceiving me when I heard her saying, within three hours of the EU vote being announced on the Friday morning, that she had already instructed civil servants and officials of the Scottish Government to draw up the necessary legislation for a second independence referendum? *[Interruption.]*

**The First Minister:** I know that Ruth Davidson has a selective memory—she has of course forgotten that, following the EU referendum, she said that we should seek to stay in the single market. *[Interruption.]*

If Ruth Davidson had listened carefully that day, she would also have heard me say that I was determined to explore alternative options to independence. I sought to find a way of allowing Scotland to stay in the UK while protecting the most vital elements of our relationship with Europe. In other words, we tried to square the UK-wide vote to leave the EU with the Scottish vote to remain, and to give effect to how people in Scotland voted in both 2014 and 2016.

We were encouraged in our endeavours by the initial comments of the Prime Minister, who made a commitment last July to seek agreement with the devolved Administrations before triggering article 50. Therefore, in the compromise paper that we published in December, we argued first that the UK as a whole should stay inside the single market. That seemed to be the obvious consensus position in a state where 48 per cent of voters and two out of four nations voted to stay in the EU. It would also have been in line with the clear commitment in the Conservatives’ own manifesto.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** Will the First Minister take an intervention?

**The First Minister:** Not right now—I am going to make some progress.

Despite that, the Prime Minister ruled out single-market membership, without any prior consultation with the devolved Administrations. That in itself was a breach of the commitment that she made in July.

However, the Scottish Government also proposed ways in which, with political will, the option of Scotland staying in the single market might be achieved, even if the rest of the UK chose to leave. We also proposed significant new powers for this Parliament, short of independence, that would help to protect Scotland’s interests in the post-Brexit landscape—powers that would effectively have delivered the federal solution that some in this chamber say that they favour.

However, all of those efforts at compromise—each and every one—have been rejected. Indeed, there has been no meaningful attempt whatsoever

by the UK Government to explore those options and to find common ground.

That brings me to where we are today. Having voted to remain in the EU, we face now being taken out against our will. The probability is that our exit, which will take us outside the single market, will be on harder and harsher terms than most people, including many leave voters, would have supported in the run-up to last June's referendum.

The voice of this Parliament has been ignored every step of the way, and far from any indication of new powers, we now face the prospect of the UK Government using Brexit to reserve for itself powers in areas that are currently devolved to this Parliament.

All of that raises fundamental questions for Scotland. If the UK Government can ignore this Parliament on one of the most fundamental issues that the country faces, what meaning can ever be attached to the idea that the UK is a partnership of equals? If the UK refuses to guarantee the rights of EU citizens and focuses on ending free movement, despite the fact that growing our population is economically essential for Scotland, what does that mean for Scotland's desire to be an open, inclusive and welcoming society? If the UK Government is determined to leave the single market, despite the wealth of evidence that doing so could permanently weaken our economy by risking jobs, investment and trade, what does that mean for our living standards and our future prosperity?

Add to all that the fact that, because of the collapse of the Labour Party, the current UK Government could be in power until 2030 or beyond, and it becomes clear that Scotland faces a fundamental question, not just about how we respond to Brexit, but about what sort of country we want Scotland to be.

The answer to that question is surely one that should lie in our own hands—that is the fundamental point at the heart of today's debate. As a country, we cannot avoid change, but we can choose what kind of change we want.

Let me say quite clearly that I understand why many people do not relish the prospect of another referendum on a major issue within the space of a few years. That is something that weighs heavily on me, as I am sure it does on others. However, the alternative to planning now to give Scotland a choice is simply to drift through the next two years, crossing our fingers and hoping for the best, while fearing the worst, and knowing that no matter how hard we work to avoid it, we may well have to accept a hard Brexit—come what may and no matter how damaging that turns out to be. It means accepting now that, at the end of the

process, we will not even have the option of choosing an alternative path—the direction of our nation will be decided for us.

I do not consider that to be right or fair. The future of Scotland should not be imposed upon us; it should be the choice of the people of Scotland.

**Ruth Davidson:** Will the First Minister give way?

**The First Minister:** I have taken an intervention from you; I will take one from Willie Rennie.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Ruth Davidson first.

**Ruth Davidson:** The First Minister talks about—

**The First Minister:** Sorry, I said Willie Rennie.

**Ruth Davidson:** I am sorry.

**Willie Rennie:** I do not know whether that indicates any preference.

Alex Salmond, the First Minister's foreign affairs spokesman, said this morning that an independent Scotland would only seek membership of the European Free Trade Association, not full membership of the European Union. How can the First Minister use the EU to claim a mandate when she cannot guarantee—and does not even seek—full membership of the European Union?

**The First Minister:** The SNP's position in favour of membership of the EU is clear and longstanding. It is beyond any doubt that if we do not become independent, our membership of the EU will be ended because we will be taken out of it against our will.

**Neil Findlay:** Will the First Minister take an intervention?

**The First Minister:** No—I am going to make some progress.

I turn to the question of the timing of a referendum. As a matter of principle, the timing, together with the franchise and—subject to the advice of the Electoral Commission—the question, should be for the Parliament to decide, just as in 2014. The decision should be taken in the interests of the Scottish people having an informed choice, not driven by a consideration of what is convenient for any politician or party.

The Prime Minister has said:

“now is not the time”.

I agree with that. The choice must be informed, and that means that a referendum should not happen before the terms of Brexit are known.

In the speech that the Prime Minister gave at Lancaster house in January, she said:



"I want us to have reached an agreement about our future partnership by the time the 2-year Article 50 process has concluded."

If the Prime Minister is to deliver on that commitment, the terms of that agreement will require to be clear around six months in advance—in autumn next year—to allow for the process of EU ratification. The European Commission has said that there will be only 18 months for negotiation. That has led to my view that the earliest time at which Scotland could make an informed choice would be in the autumn of next year.

It is also important that the choice is made while it is still possible to choose a different path in a timely manner.

**Ruth Davidson:** Will the First Minister give way?

**The First Minister:** I am going to make progress—I have taken lots of interventions.

My judgment is therefore that the latest date for that choice to be made should be around the time that the UK leaves the EU—in the spring of 2019. That is the timeframe that I ask Parliament to endorse today.

I make it clear that if the UK Government disagrees with that timeframe, it should set out a clear alternative and the rationale for that. As I have said in recent days, I am—within reason—happy to have a discussion about that to see whether we can find common ground that I can propose to the Parliament. However, it simply will not be acceptable for the UK Government to stand as a road block to the democratically expressed will of the Parliament.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the First Minister give way?

**The First Minister:** No—I am going to make some progress.

It is, of course, entirely legitimate for the UK Government and other parties in the chamber to robustly oppose independence. That is an honourable position, albeit one that I disagree with. However, in the circumstances that we now face, for the UK Government to stand in the way of Scotland even having a choice would be, in my view, wrong, unfair and utterly unsustainable.

**Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** Will the First Minister give way?

**The First Minister:** No—I am going to make some progress.

Let me now turn to the nature of that choice. I have already acknowledged that it must be an informed choice. That means that the people of Scotland need to know the terms of Brexit and to

be in a position to make an assessment of the pros and cons before making that choice. It also means that they need to understand the implications and opportunities of independence, whether for the economy, the currency, Europe or the many other matters that people have questions about. Those of us who advocate independence have a responsibility to consider a range of issues in light of the changed circumstances that Brexit has brought about—we did not choose to be in these circumstances—and to present that information in a clear way. That is exactly what we will do, and we will do so in good time to allow scrutiny and debate well in advance of a referendum that is 18 months away at the earliest. By doing so, we will allow people to make a genuinely informed choice between being taken down a hard Brexit path or becoming an independent country that is able to chart our own course.

That approach will be in stark contrast to the approach to the EU referendum. Not only were there no details and no answers before that vote, but that remains the case—shamefully so—nine months after it.

Let me seek to end on a note of consensus. We might differ on the best way forward, but I suspect that almost all of us across the parties agree that we would rather not be in this situation. The majority of us wish that the UK as a whole had chosen to remain in the EU and that the UK Government was pursuing continued single-market membership, but we cannot avoid or ignore the consequences of the UK-wide vote or the UK Government's response to it.

My determination at all times since 23 June 2016 has been to stand up for Scotland's interests, and this Parliament's support has been welcome. However, nine months on, there is no indication at all that this Parliament's voice has carried any weight at Westminster. Instead, the UK Government is taking decisions entirely unilaterally that I and many others believe will deeply damage our economy, our society and our standing in the world.

Whether we like it or not, Scotland faces a fundamental decision on what country we want to be. The question before this chamber is simple: who gets to make that decision? The answer to that question cannot be me or the Prime Minister. The decision about what kind of country we are and what path we take can only be made by the people of Scotland. Therefore, I ask members to support the motion before us today.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of government best suited to their needs and therefore mandates the Scottish Government to take forward discussions with the

UK Government on the details of an order under section 30 of the Scotland Act 1998 to ensure that the Scottish Parliament can legislate for a referendum to be held that will give the people of Scotland a choice over the future direction and governance of their country at a time, and with a question and franchise, determined by the Scottish Parliament, which would most appropriately be between the autumn of 2018, when there is clarity over the outcome of the Brexit negotiations, and around the point at which the UK leaves the EU in spring 2019.

14:21

**Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):**

On Monday last week, the First Minister announced her intention to demand a second referendum on independence; on Saturday, she used her party conference speech to demand a second referendum on independence; and, today, we meet here to debate the SNP's demand for a second referendum on independence. At least this past week has shown everyone what this Scottish Government's number 1 priority really is: separation, not education. This week, it made clear what comes first.

We have heard the First Minister speak today. Let me run through what she has said about a second referendum in times past. In August 2014, a month before we voted on independence, we were told:

"constitutional referenda are once-in-a-generation events."

I take it that she does not deny saying that.

A few weeks later in her party conference speech, the First Minister summoned all her gravitas to tell her delegates that another referendum in this Parliament without a change of opinion

"would be wrong and we won't do it."

A year ago this very week, she and I addressed a Federation of Small Businesses conference in Glasgow, where a businessman called Alan Robbie asked her why she was taking us back to a referendum. Looking him in the eye, she promised him:

"If opinion stays as it was in the referendum, there won't be another referendum."

She talks of outrage. I wonder how outraged Mr Robbie is feeling today.

**The First Minister:** Will Ruth Davidson take an intervention?

**Ruth Davidson:** Absolutely.

**The First Minister:** Why has Ruth Davidson omitted to cite the manifesto on which I was elected last May as First Minister?

**Ruth Davidson:** The First Minister should not worry; I am getting to that.

All through her speech, the First Minister talked about the will of the people of Scotland. Let me read what our premier psephologist, John Curtice, has said:

"Each poll has asked a somewhat different question ... but each has obtained much the same picture. Only just over a third ... say that there should be a second referendum, while around a half ... reckon there should not."

The people of Scotland do not want this. It will not wash to have a First Minister standing there, washing her hands, saying, "It's not me that's dragging us there. It's with a heavy heart. A big Tory did this and ran away." I say to the First Minister, "That will not do—take responsibility".

If all those quotations are not enough, and just for good measure, in the live television debates that we all took part in last April, watched by hundreds of thousands of Scotland's voters, the First Minister made herself clear:

"If support for independence doesn't increase there won't be another referendum."

Support has not increased. Indeed, according to the weekend's polls, the impact of the First minister's big announcement last week has led to a drop in support for independence. Never mind, because those in the SNP do not need to acknowledge old promises, still less honour them. Indeed, we are told today to forget about what was once said and submit to the SNP's will. We do not, and we will not.

Let me set out the many reasons why my party will be opposing the Government motion today.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Because you are told to by London.

**Ruth Davidson:** One day, Kenny Gibson will make it to the front bench, but it will not be this week.

We will oppose the motion because it calls on this Parliament to gain the power to call a referendum between the autumn of 2018 and the spring of 2019. The motion also insists that only this Parliament should have the say over the franchise and details of a referendum.

That bulldozer approach is completely at odds with the way in which the 2014 referendum was held. Back then, the SNP won a majority with a clear pledge to introduce a referendum bill, the UK and Scottish Governments worked together on proposals for a fair, legal and decisive referendum, and the Edinburgh agreement was then signed, with both sides promising to respect the result.

How different things are today. Under this First Minister, the SNP lost its majority, with no clear pledge to hold a referendum—I am sorry, but the belief that something should happen if something else takes place might be many things, but it is not

a clear mandate. Furthermore, the SNP wants to decide unilaterally on the rules and timing of the referendum. We now know that there is no agreement between the UK and Scottish Governments on the prospect of a referendum.

I remind the SNP that it once described the last referendum—with the Edinburgh agreement, with unanimous backing in this Parliament, and with 92 per cent support across the public—as the gold-standard approach. What we have today is not the gold standard but a tin-pot approach to the biggest decision that we could ever be asked to make.

Let us cut to the chase. The SNP's plans last week were not about trying to hold a fair, legal and decisive referendum. They were really about a well-rehearsed game, which is to put forward an unworkable proposal, wait for Westminster politicians to point that out and then rush to a nearby microphone with the angry face on and trot out the same old, tired complaints.

Once upon a time, that might even have worked, but it will not work any more, because most people in Scotland are sick to death of the games. Most people in Scotland do not want another referendum any time soon, just three years after the last one, and most people in Scotland see the plain common sense in our position. Brexit is going to be a major challenge for this country and none of us knows how it will play out, how we will come through it and what impact there will be for our country, which is exactly why we question how we can make a decision on our future constitutional path at a time of such uncertainty.

Why start an independence referendum campaign now, at this very moment, when the process of leaving the EU is only just beginning? Why ask the people of Scotland to choose our future when they have not had the chance to see it play out? Most of all, how can SNP members sit here today and demand another referendum, when they still cannot answer the basic questions about their own proposition, on currency, on long-term membership of the European Union, and on the cost of independence? Another SNP conference has gone by; another opportunity to answer even basic questions has been squandered. In short, the First Minister wants a date, but she will not give Scotland a plan.

Our position is as follows: there cannot be a referendum until people know what they are voting for. There cannot be a referendum until the Brexit process is complete and people know what both the UK and independence look like. One does not make a decision on leaving the UK by voting blind.

We also think that there should not be a referendum when there is no political or public consent for it—not when we were promised by this

First Minister that another referendum would not take place for a generation; not when we were told that it would not happen without a change of opinion; and not when we know that it will cause more division and more uncertainty for our country.

I know that my plea will fall on deaf ears on the SNP benches, even among those who voted for Brexit and now see a sense in a pause. Apart from Alex Neil, those members still have not had the guts to stand up for their principles.

However, we know that the Scottish Greens are different. It is a party that claims to stand by its commitments. We therefore call on the Greens today to stick by their pledge to the people of Scotland. They said that another referendum should

“come about only by the will of the people”:

there is none. They said that it should not be driven by

“the calculations of party-political advantage”:

I am afraid that there is plenty of that. I warn the Greens that if they dump the promises today and push this over the line, their position as the self-appointed moral guardians in this place will be no more.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Ruth Davidson:** I will be absolutely delighted to give way to the co-convenor of the Green Party talking against his own manifesto pledge.

**Patrick Harvie:** It is interesting that the member raises manifesto pledges. The Tory manifesto from 2015, on the very same page as the commitment to hold the reckless EU referendum, states:

“We are clear about what we want from Europe. We say: yes to the Single Market.”

Have I misunderstood the meaning of that apparently clear commitment?

**Ruth Davidson:** The Prime Minister has already said that she wants UK firms, including Scottish ones, to be able to operate within and trade with the single market.

The whataboutery in the Green Party manifesto is fantastic. It says:

“If a new referendum is to happen, it should come about by the will of the people, and not be driven by calculations of party political advantage.”

I say to Patrick Harvie that he should pin that to his front as he goes through the voting booths.

I know that all the analysis and commentary surrounding today's debate have pointed to a predetermined result and that there is little point in

turning up, as we all know how it is going to end—with the Greens dutifully backing the SNP, as oftentimes before and as Patrick Harvie has just admitted. However, even in the groundhog day that is Scottish constitutional politics, I have a longer memory.

I remember a time when parties across the constitutional divide united to act for the country. I remember September last year, when the Parliament voted for ministers to call in major national health service changes. Six months on, there has been no action by the Scottish Government. Also in September, the Parliament voted to ban fracking. I did not back the motion, but the votes were there for it in the chamber. However, there has been no action by the Scottish Government. In November, the Scottish Parliament voted to abolish the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012. Four months on, there has been no action by the Scottish Government. In January, the Parliament voted against SNP plans to scrap the Highlands and Islands Enterprise board, yet there has been no action by the Scottish Government. Just this month, the Parliament voted against SNP plans to abolish the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. Five times in six months the will of the Scottish Parliament has been clear, and five times in six months the SNP Government has chosen to ignore it.

If, today, the vote goes as all the commentators expect, I hope that SNP members will reflect on this as they cry grievance: why do they exclaim that the Westminster Government should recognise votes in the Scottish Parliament when the Scottish Government does not do so? Will the SNP explain to those Scots who are watching at home why votes on crucial issues such as health, education funding, enterprise and energy should be wilfully ignored by the SNP Government, but when it comes to independence—and only when it comes to independence—Holyrood is sacrosanct?

The referendum may be the First Minister's priority, but it is not mine and it is not that of my party. We say let this Parliament focus on the issues that we were elected to deliver on: better schools, a sustainable NHS, a growing economy and a strong Scotland as part of a strong United Kingdom.

I move amendment S5M-04710.2, to leave out from “acknowledges” to end and insert:

“declines the Scottish Government's proposal for a referendum on independence before April 2019; believes that it would be unfair to ask this question while the process of leaving the EU is still ongoing and while the Scottish Government has failed to set out its own position on independence; considers that no referendum should take place while there is no public or political consent for one, and urges the Scottish Government to focus its efforts on

working with the UK Government to secure the best possible new relationship with the EU.”

14:33

**Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** I wish that this was the start of a two-day debate on education in Scotland. We could focus on the need to close the attainment gap, put forward proposals to give young people the best chance in life, and come up with innovative ways to lift 260,000 Scottish children out of poverty. Instead, we are back talking about the only thing that has ever really mattered to the SNP.

Nicola Sturgeon wakes up every single day thinking of ways to engineer another referendum, because leaving the UK is the only thing that matters to her—not improving education in Scotland or lifting children out of poverty, but independence. It will always come first, and the truth is that it always has.

When the first majority Labour Government established the NHS and the welfare state, the SNP wanted Scotland to leave the UK. When the last Labour Government introduced groundbreaking antidiscrimination laws, maternity and paternity leave, the national minimum wage, tax credits, rights at work and civil partnerships, the SNP was arguing for Scotland to leave the United Kingdom. When the UK Labour Government delivered a Scottish Parliament—the expressed will of the people following a referendum—the SNP still campaigned for Scotland to leave the United Kingdom. Brexit is not the motivation for another referendum; it is just the latest excuse.

We have heard a lot from the First Minister about mandates, but people have noticed the shift in the SNP's language. It used to demand that the will of the Scottish people be respected, but the will of the Scottish people was clearly expressed in 2014. In that first referendum, 85 per cent of our fellow citizens voted: they voted by a clear majority to remain in the United Kingdom. More than 2 million Scots, in the biggest mandate that has ever been given to any political leaders in Scotland's history, voted to remain in the UK. That is the will of the Scottish people, and that is what should be respected.

We have heard from the First Minister about the need to respect the will of this Parliament. If only she had respected the mandate that was given to the Government by Parliament before now. If she had done so, several local NHS services would be free from the threats of closure that are hanging above their heads. The First Minister would have banned fracking and would have scrapped the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012. Parliament has had its say on Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Further and Higher

Education Funding Council. Will the First Minister respect that? Parliament voted to demand a change of course from the nationalists on education. Given that education is apparently her defining priority, surely the First Minister will respect that.

When Parliament votes for another referendum—as it inevitably will, thanks to the perpetual crutch that the Greens provide—let us not pretend that that reflects the will of the Scottish people, because it does not. The people of Scotland do not want another divisive referendum.

Last week, the First Minister said that the 2014 referendum was not divisive. She obviously did not speak to many people beyond her party faithful, because my experience and that of the very many Scots who have taken the time to tell me about it on the doorstep, in the street and by email, is that this country—their country—felt more divided then than at any time in their lived memory. Families argued, colleagues fell out and communities were split down the middle. No bus, train, pub, community centre, workplace or living room escaped that fallout, and last Monday—the first day of this campaign—felt just as hostile and polarised as the 847th and final day of the last one. Where will it end?

Some of those who voted to leave the UK and the majority of those who voted to remain in the UK do not want to go back to the divisions of the past, but if there is to be another referendum—if the First Minister must drag the people of Scotland back there—the Labour Party will campaign with everything we have to remain in the UK. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Kezia Dugdale:** Let me tell members why. If the First Minister wants a different result from the last one, she might listen to people who do not agree with her. I believe in the United Kingdom—not as a symbol of past glories or purest ideology, but as a living, breathing union of nations that delivers for the people of Scotland. It delivers for the pensioners, whose income is secured through a UK state pension and benefits system. It delivers for the shipyard workers, who are in jobs because of UK defence contracts, and it delivers to the staff in East Kilbride, who deliver aid to some of the poorest countries in the world on behalf of all of us. It also delivers for the schools that are built because of the extra money that we receive by being in the UK; for the NHS that we built together and which is sustained because we pool and share our resources across the whole of Britain; for the businesses, large and small, that are able to thrive because of the access that they have to our UK single market; and for the scientists who carry out life-saving medical research because of the funding that they receive from UK research

councils. Those are the things that I value most and those are the things that being part of the UK has delivered for families across Scotland. It has delivered so much prosperity and security.

At a time when so much of the world is ravaged by division and when the trend in too many places is separation, I value the fact that our four nations come together to share sovereignty and resources, and that we recognise that together we are stronger—more so than we ever could be apart.

I say to SNP members: it is not this union of nations that is intrinsically unjust or unfair—it is the actions of the powerful people within it. I hate what the Tories are doing to Britain. I have never felt anger like it. *[Interruption.]* The austerity programme is destroying public services that we all value and which the poorest people rely on. The SNP cannot escape from the facts: Scotland's leaving the UK would make things much worse for the poorest people in Scotland. In the six years during which I have sat in this chamber, I have never once heard a convincing argument to the contrary.

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** Will Kezia Dugdale take an intervention?

**Kezia Dugdale:** Let us see whether Kevin Stewart can give us a convincing argument.

**Kevin Stewart:** Ms Dugdale mentioned poor folk. As we see the Tories advancing their austerity agenda and making poor folk even poorer, is she happy to go around doors saying that she will be happy with a Tory Government for the next 10, 20 or 30 years?

**Kezia Dugdale:** The problem for Kevin Stewart—and, indeed, for the rest of the SNP's MSPs—is that they want to replace Tory austerity with turbocharged austerity. The truth of the matter is that separation would mean £15 billion-worth of cuts—15 thousand million pounds-worth of cuts to schools and hospitals. The Government's own figures tell us that. It would mean cuts to pensions—John Swinney told us that—and it would mean an end to the UK defence contracts that keep thousands of people in work.

Those are the facts, but the nationalists do not want to hear them. They will howl and they will rage, and they will question the patriotism of those who back unity over division, but they cannot escape the reality. We are a stronger, richer, fairer and better nation by remaining in the UK.

Tomorrow evening, Scottish Labour MSPs will vote against a divisive second independence referendum. That was our manifesto commitment to the people of Scotland, and we will honour it.

I move amendment S5M-4710.4, to leave out from “and therefore mandates” to end and insert:

“; believes that a strong Scottish Parliament within a federal UK would meet these needs; recognises that the overwhelming will of the Scottish people is that there should be no second divisive independence referendum; believes that far from giving Scots a choice, a second independence referendum would only increase uncertainty and cause greater division as the UK faces a hard Tory Brexit, and asserts that there should be no second independence referendum.”

**The Presiding Officer:** I now call Patrick Harvie to speak to and move the amendment in his name. [*Interruption.*]

14:42

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** It is nice to be given such a warm welcome—I appreciate it very much.

If we are at the beginning of potentially two years of debate on the independence question again, it is important that we recognise the mixed feelings that exist. I am sure that I am not the only member who has seen angry emails on both sides of the debate telling me that an independence referendum is an absolute priority or something that must be opposed absolutely.

I have seen keyboard warriors on both sides. I have also spoken face to face to many people who remain as yet unconvinced, or who have mixed feelings. Equally, we have to acknowledge that there are a great many people in Scotland who believe, whether reluctantly or with enthusiasm, that the future of Scotland has to be decided not by one Parliament or the other, or by one Government or the other, but by the people who live here.

Before our political future was thrown into turmoil nine months ago, most independence supporters I know understood that independence was more likely to be a long-term aspiration, and we were going to build the case for it over that long term—that included my own party. We suggested one means by which the issue could be revisited. However, in assessing what the “will of the people” means, as so many people are keen to use that phrase, we have to acknowledge that 2014 was an expression of the will of the people, but so was 2016, and the 62 per cent voting to remain inside the European Union was also an expression of the will of the people that must be respected.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I ask Mr Harvie the same question that I asked Nicola Sturgeon. What assessment has he done of the will of the Scottish people in 2017? Do they want a referendum or not?

**Patrick Harvie:** The two clearest recent expressions of the will of the people are 55 per cent voting to remain part of the UK two and a half years ago and 62 per cent voting to remain part of the European Union just nine months ago. If the UK Government had shown any interest in reconciling those two positions, we might not be where we are today.

**Ruth Davidson:** I thank Patrick Harvie for giving way, because I know that he has just done so. Will he address and acknowledge the point that the question in 2016 was about the UK staying part of the European Union and said nothing about Scotland as anything different? Will he also acknowledge that there are thousands of Scots, including many members, who are furious that their vote to remain has been appropriated as some sort of vote for independence when it was no such thing?

**Patrick Harvie:** There are such people and there are also people who are equally furious that their no vote in 2014 is being taken as an excuse to take us out of the European Union against our will. It is absurd to suggest that we should not respond to the fundamentally changed circumstances in which we find ourselves. A few minutes ago, Ruth Davidson said that we should not just say that a big Tory did it and ran away. Good grief, I wish that they would run away, but they are dragging us with them. That is the problem.

**Neil Findlay:** If, at some point, Scotland was to leave the EU, should there be another EU referendum if Scotland was ever to seek to go back into it?

**Patrick Harvie:** I am perfectly open to having that debate when the time comes. The question today is whether we should seek a section 30 order, as my party decided that we should five months ago, in October, when we took the decision to our party members and asked them whether they supported the call for a section 30 order. They did and I was happy to vote with them.

The situation is changed not only by the EU referendum result but by everything that the UK Government has done with it. It was reckless of the UK Government to hold that referendum to resolve its internal squabbles. It is astonishing to be told by Ruth Davidson that there should not be a referendum until people know what they are voting for, having seen the utter lack of a plan for what to do next after the EU referendum and the disrespect that has been shown to Scotland since then.

The UK Government is using a narrow UK-wide majority to ignore its own commitments to the single market. As I mentioned earlier, on the same page in its manifesto as the commitment to hold

the referendum, there are five or six commitments to stay in and protect the single market.

The same is true of prominent leave campaigners. Daniel Hannan from the Tory party said:

“Absolutely nobody is talking about threatening our place in the single market”.

Owen Paterson said:

“only a madman”—

that was his language; Owen Paterson’s language would never be mine on any subject—

“would actually leave the market”.

Nigel Farage, Matthew Elliott, Arron Banks and others said similar things.

Ruth Davidson, not just during the EU referendum debate but after the result was in, said:

“I want to stay in the single market. Even if a consequence of that is maintaining free movement of labour, yes.”

I gave her credit for that at the time and her abandonment of that position is disgraceful.

Whether members believe in a deregulated free market or, as I do, place value in the raft of social, environmental and economic regulations that have come from the European Union, which have been achieved there and which protect our quality of life, the argument about how a single market works and what it means is critical. It must include a shared approach to regulation and freedom of movement. We have already heard and will continue to hear mealy-mouthed terms such as access to the single market. That kind of language cannot be taken seriously, because it will not mean access for people deciding where they want to move to work; it will mean access only for business. If people are not free to decide unimpeded where they wish to sell their labour, they are not in a single market. Therefore, if anyone is to be accused of breaking promises, it is the Tory party in both Parliaments.

The Green amendment talks of the terms in which the Parliament should set the franchise and the timing. The UK Government deliberately excluded young voters and citizens of other EU countries from last year’s vote. We should not be satisfied with that. Neither group was expected to be particularly pro-independence in 2014, but we all agreed that they had a right to take part in determining the future of the country that they live in. Those who have chosen to come here from other EU countries in particular have been treated in the shabbiest way possible by the UK Government. Their lives, their careers, their contribution to our society and the future of their families have been treated as playthings. Even

those who hold an affection for the UK as a political union or for Britishness as an identity must surely look at the way in which the UK Government is treating our friends, neighbours and colleagues and be ashamed.

I am sorry to say that the Labour and Liberal Democrat amendments both sound like a bit of wishful thinking—a fantasy of Scotland’s strong place in a federal UK that simply does not exist. Labour has chosen to play the Gordon Brown card pretty early this time around. I wonder what it is holding back for the final weeks this time.

**Kezia Dugdale:** I understand that Patrick Harvie will spend the next two years campaigning for independence. However, can he tell us whether he will spend all his time doing that, or will he make the case for powers that we know are coming back from Brussels to come to this place?

**Patrick Harvie:** I am not resigned to Scotland being taken out of the European Union against the will of the people of Scotland, and today’s debate is about holding the line against that.

At a UK level, the Liberal Democrats are going around kidding on that they are the only pro-EU party left, while here in Scotland they want the Westminster Parliament to block our only remaining path to EU membership.

It seems bizarre to suggest, as the Conservative amendment does, that the Scottish Government must work together with the UK Government when it takes two to tango. UK ministers have blanked Scotland entirely in this process, ruling out negotiations to respect the way in which Scotland voted. Theresa May promised to develop a shared approach with all the devolved Administrations before moving forward with article 50. We can now see how empty that promise was.

On the question of timing, the idea of delaying a referendum until after 2019, when we have been given the opportunity to see how our new relationship is working, fundamentally misrepresents leaving the EU as something good instead of the act of political wreckage that it is. Autumn 2018 will be after the negotiations have concluded and when there is clarity about the arrangements. A deal that is negotiated by a UK Government that Scotland did not choose, with an EU institution on which Scotland is no longer represented, about Brexit, which Scotland did not vote for either, followed by a period of ratification by every other European country, would leave the future of Scotland in the hands of everybody else in the whole of Europe, and the citizens of Scotland as the only people voiceless in that process. We cannot accept that and I will not vote for it.

I move amendment S5M-04710.5, to insert at end:

“; believes that this gives people in Scotland a choice at a time when there is both the most information and most opportunity to act; further believes that 16 and 17-year-olds and EU citizens, who were excluded from the EU referendum, should be entitled to vote, and considers that this referendum is necessary given the Prime Minister’s decision to negotiate a hard exit from the EU, including leaving the single market, which conflicts with assurances given by the UK Government and prominent Leave campaigners, and which takes no account of the overwhelming Remain vote in Scotland.”

14:53

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Liberal Democrats will vote against the Government’s motion tomorrow. We oppose another divisive independence referendum.

First, I will address the issue of the cast-iron mandate. The SNP bases its mandate for another divisive referendum on the European Union. However, now the SNP tells us that it will not seek or guarantee membership of the EU with its referendum. Instead, Alex Salmond, its official foreign affairs spokesperson and the ex-First Minister, has clearly said that EFTA is what it is after—the European Economic Area. The SNP will use the EU to get the referendum, even though the referendum will not get the EU. We know the reason why—it is because the SNP is cynically courting the one in three independence supporters who backed Brexit, some of whom are in the chamber today. It is prepared to use pro-Europeans to get a referendum but will sell them out to win independence. That is low politics for narrow gain.

While we are on low politics, we have the Greens. It seems as if it happened in a different time, but we can recall the budget just a few weeks ago—that triumph of a budget where they secured funds that were going to be spent anyway and got not a penny extra for the environment. Far from being bold and green, they were a bland shade of beige. That was the first broken promise of the year.

Now we have the verbal gymnastics of Patrick Harvie, who argues that manifesto commitments do not count any more. What happened to the 1 million names on a petition? Where is the role of the people in deciding whether to have another referendum? His idea of participative democracy is a few Green members gathering on a wet Saturday afternoon in Perth to airbrush out their manifesto commitments. How can the First Minister claim a cast-iron mandate if she depends on the Greens, who did not even have it in their manifesto? That is the SNP’s cast-iron mandate. In just three months, two manifesto commitments have been blown out of the water, and people will remember Patrick Harvie and his excuses.

I predict that tomorrow, the SNP and its online bedroom warriors will be battering their keyboards to demand that the will of the Scottish Parliament be respected. I do not recall those masses demanding that the SNP respect the will of the Parliament when the Parliament voted to save Highlands and Islands Enterprise or the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, and I do not recall outrage when the SNP ignored the Parliament. I do not recall marches on the streets of this capital when the Government ignored the vote on the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012.

**The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald):** Will the member give way?

**Willie Rennie:** I do not remember protests about local health services or education performance. I could go on and on. For the people who I mentioned, somehow Parliament counts only when it agrees with the Scottish National Party. This Parliament has been systematically undermined by the SNP when it has not agreed with the SNP, but the SNP demands that the will of Parliament be respected whenever it so wishes. This Scottish Parliament is not the Parliament of the Scottish National Party.

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Willie Rennie:** The referendum in 2014 was a fair, legal and decisive vote, as agreed and specified by the Edinburgh agreement. I remember the great fanfare with which the agreement was signed at a grand occasion up at St Andrew’s house, with high security but nobody watching. A special broadcast was made by the then First Minister to mark the special occasion. Both sides were supposed to respect the result. With its demands, today the SNP is breaching the Edinburgh agreement—that is what it is doing. If the SNP cannot even stick to the agreement that it signed, that does not bode well for the ability of an independent Scotland to stick to international treaties.

**Christina McKelvie:** Will the member give way on that point?

**Willie Rennie:** No.

**Mark McDonald:** Will Willie Rennie give way?

**Willie Rennie:** Alex Salmond said that the referendum in 2014 was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Some might have heard him at the weekend denying that he ever said that, despite it being on the record. We have got it on YouTube. Then he denied that he had denied it, despite that being on YouTube, too. Then he dismissed the whole thing as complete and utter nonsense. That



is the fastest denial about a denial about a broken promise that has ever been given.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Mr Rennie give way?

**Mark McDonald:** Give way.

**Willie Rennie:** “How long is forever?” said Alice. “Sometimes just one second,” said the White Rabbit.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

**Willie Rennie:** Time is a relative concept, especially in Wonderland, or indeed in the SNP’s Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Rennie, there is a point of order. Ms Martin, I hope that it is a point of order and not an interruption disguised as a point of order.

**Gillian Martin:** It is a point of order. Rule 7.3 of standing orders states that, during a debate, members must show courtesy to others in the chamber. Not taking any interventions when delivering a speech is not showing respect to the other members in the chamber.

**The Presiding Officer:** That is not a point of order.

**Willie Rennie:** I think that the Presiding Officer knew that that was not going to be a point of order before he allowed it.

In the past 10 days, I am sure that we have all had the torrent of abuse from SNP supporters, stirred from their three-year slumber by the call to arms from our First Minister, and the feeling of dread, which even the First Minister acknowledged at the weekend. The referendum will divide families, divide communities and divide friends. That is exactly what happened last time and, if SNP members are deaf to that, they need to get a life. That personal division is on its own good enough reason to oppose another referendum, but there is wider division.

Division from Europe is not resolved by division in the UK. The response to a hard Conservative Brexit is not hard SNP independence. We do not mount on to the chaos of Brexit the chaos of independence. We do not respond to the break from Europe with a break from the UK. I opposed such divisive politics last year in the Brexit referendum campaign and I will oppose it on independence, too.

We have an awful lot more to do in this country, but the Scottish Government is distracted by its mission of independence. We just need to look at what we have seen in the past few days: the excitement on the faces—the smiles and anticipation—of SNP members, who are slavering at the prospect of another independence debate.

The Government is distracted by its lifelong mission of independence while the performance of our education system is slipping down the international rankings. The poor mental health services that Scotland deserves better from, the sluggish economy, the struggling care services, the climate change targets missed—all those things should get the Government excited, but they never do. We can tell the SNP’s priority from what gets it exercised. Today has blown apart any idea that the SNP is in it for the greater good; the SNP is only in it for the SNP’s own good.

We have made great progress on reforming our United Kingdom. In just 20 years, we have created this Parliament, which is based on proportional representation and has been built on the foundations of human rights. It has gained more powers, including—most recently—powers over tax. We should be proud of what we have achieved together, through everybody in the Parliament working together.

I want to create a federal United Kingdom with power that is shared across the country, a written constitution, fair votes and an elected second chamber. Such reforms are on the way to making our United Kingdom even stronger. The campaign for independence undermines that chance and that momentum.

There is a positive case for the United Kingdom. The economic case for the UK is even stronger than it was in 2014, but it is not just about numbers on a spreadsheet; it is about the values that we share. It is about the compassion that has built some of the best charities in the world, such as Oxfam and Save the Children—British charities that are spreading compassion around the world. It is about the compassion that has built the second-biggest aid budget in the world—SNP members do not like that. It is about the compassion that has built one of the best health services in the world.

This is not about flags; it is about the ties that bind us together, and no Scottish nationalist here or anywhere else in Scotland will ever tell me that I should be ashamed of those ties or that compassion. That is the modern United Kingdom of which I am proud to be a part. The Liberal Democrats stated clearly in our manifesto that we would oppose another divisive independence referendum, and that is exactly what we will do.

I move amendment S5M-04710.3 to leave out from “and therefore mandates” to end and insert:

“; believes that a second referendum on Scottish independence would only compound the uncertainty of Brexit and its risk to the economy, environment and security; notes that all measures of public opinion show that there is no appetite for such a vote; further believes that there is no mandate for another Scottish independence referendum on the basis of the UK leaving the EU when

there are no cast-iron guarantees that full membership of the EU will be sought or granted, and supports the development of a positive future for Scotland inside a federal UK.”

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

15:04

**Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP):** Over the course of the coming days and weeks, as we debate whether the people of Scotland are to be given a choice over the future direction of our country, one small but very important word should be our byword. I have heard it used a number of times today. The word is “respect”. As others have, I have read many articles and comments that contain the language of hatred and division, so we should declare that it is time to stop that now. Members have a special responsibility and a public duty to show leadership and to show respect to each other in how we conduct the debate.

I saw a couple of comments last week on which we would do well to dwell. The first was in an excellent blog by Chris Creegan, who is the chief executive of the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability. A couple of sentences sum up the kernel of the message that he was trying to get across. He said:

“If we characterise our opponents as divisive we will divide. If we use the language of hate we will create bitterness.”

The second comment was in an important intervention from the Church of Scotland, in which it said that

“there is nothing inevitable about this debate being divisive and acrimonious.”

I implore all those who take part in this great debate, but especially my colleagues and friends from across the parties in this Parliament, to lead from the front and to show respect for each other’s point of view. [*Applause.*] The debate will be passionate and hard argued, and we may vehemently disagree with each other, but that does not need to lead to use of language that creates division and bitterness.

At its core, the debate is about the sovereignty of the people of Scotland and the fundamental democratic principle of giving them the choice over the future direction of their country. I hope that I am correct in my belief that belief in the sovereignty of the people of Scotland still extends beyond the seats that are occupied by members of the Scottish National Party and the Green Party. I understand fully that there are those who believe, for their own legitimate reasons, that the UK Parliament is sovereign. However, for those of us who believe in the principle of the sovereignty of

the Scottish people, I cannot see how we can come to any other conclusion than that we have to enable our citizens with the right to choose their future.

There are members in the chamber who argue that the people of Scotland already decided in 2014 that they do not want Scotland to become an independent country. Let me be clear that I and my colleagues all accepted and respected that result. However, the matter is not as simple as that, and to think otherwise is an exercise in delusion.

The EU referendum result last year saw 62 per cent of the people of Scotland choosing to remain in the EU, which provided our country with a democratic puzzle, or conundrum. It is not a conundrum that can or should be resolved by politicians in Holyrood or Westminster. Only the people who posed the conundrum in the first place have the responsibility—or, indeed, the right—to solve it. They are the people of Scotland. The right of giving our people the choice to decide their future was strengthened by the election of an SNP Government last May. The Government was elected—as the First Minister has said, although I am repeating it because it is important—with a cast-iron mandate on a manifesto that declared that

“The Scottish Parliament should have the right to hold another referendum ... if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014, such as Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will.”

In a delicious irony, the right of choice for our people was given even greater weight as a result of the arguments that were deployed by the defenders of the union themselves during the 2014 referendum. They argued strongly and with real passion that Scotland’s place in the EU would be jeopardised if we were to vote yes. That was a central plank of the better together campaign. The position was neatly summed up in a tweet from the better together campaign on 2 September 2014, which said:

“What is process for removing our EU citizenship? Voting yes.”

As it turns out, voting no in 2014 has proved to be the option that guarantees removal of our EU citizenship.

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Bruce Crawford:** I am not taking an intervention. We will have plenty of time over the next two days for lots of people to contribute sensibly to the debate.

As the First Minister of Scotland has rightly said, as soon as it is clear what the shape of the Brexit deal will mean for Scotland, the people of Scotland

should have the right to have their sovereign voice heard. Our people did not choose the hard Brexit route that is being proposed by the most right-wing Government that has existed in this country at any time during my lifetime.

The next two years will decide Scotland's future. Westminster will get its say on the outcome of Brexit, the European Parliament will get its say on the outcome of Brexit and the 27 remaining countries of the EU will get their say on the outcome of Brexit. Are our citizens to be denied? I do not think so. They have the right to make their choice and to have their voice heard about the future direction of their country before it is too late for them to change direction.

For those of us who believe in the sovereignty of the people of Scotland, I say this: at decision time tomorrow, vote to let the people speak.

15:10

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** It is a real pleasure to follow my friend and colleague Bruce Crawford in the debate. If the whole of the debate could be conducted in the tone that Bruce Crawford just set, perhaps we would not be quite such a divided country.

States in the United States of America have no right to secede. The Spanish constitutional court takes the same approach to Catalonia. In Canada, Québec and the other provinces also have no unilateral right of secession. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 1998 that a

“clear expression of the desire to pursue secession”

in a referendum would give rise to an

“obligation on all parties to Confederation to negotiate constitutional changes to respond to that desire.”

However, the obligation on Canada and on the other provinces would be to

“come to the negotiating table”:

they would not have a duty to deliver secession. The court expressly rejected what it called an “absolutist proposition”—the court's words, not mine—that there would be a legal obligation on the other provinces and the federal Government to accede to the secession of a province, subject only to the negotiation of logistical details.

The contrast with the United Kingdom position is clear. The United Kingdom made it perfectly plain in 2012 to 2014 that if Scotland voted yes, Scotland would leave the United Kingdom and become a new independent state in international law. Canada never made that concession in the Québec secession referendums and, in 1998, the Supreme Court upheld Canada's decision not to do so. So, the United Kingdom takes a remarkably generous approach to secession.

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Adam Tomkins:** I will not, at the moment.

The United Kingdom's approach is much more generous than that of the United States or Spain, and it is also more generous than that of Canada. However, there is a political price to be paid for that constitutional accommodation. Here in Britain, secession proceeds by agreement, not by the unilateral demands of a separatist Government acting alone.

**The Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe (Michael Russell):** Will Adam Tomkins take an intervention?

**Adam Tomkins:** No, I will not at the moment.

For the Scottish independence referendum, that agreement was reached in 2012, in the so-called Edinburgh agreement, one of the signatories to which was the current First Minister. That agreement bound both the United Kingdom and Scottish Governments to conduct the referendum in accordance with a number of mutually agreed ground rules.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Adam Tomkins:** No.

There were rules about campaign spending, rules about the setting of the referendum question, rules about the franchise, and a rule—for what little it turned out to be worth—that the result of the referendum would be respected by both sides.

Also agreed by the two Governments was the question of timing. The referendum had to be held within an agreed timetable. The contrast between 2012 and the First Minister's unilateral demand for a second independence referendum to be held between the autumn of 2018 and the spring of 2019 could hardly be greater. No state governor would get away with that in the United States, and neither would any provincial premier in Canada. The Prime Minister of this United Kingdom was absolutely right to rule it out.

**The First Minister:** I have set out what I think would be the sensible timeframe, but I have said again in the chamber today that I am willing to discuss that with the UK Government. The question is this: is the UK Government willing to come to the negotiating table to discuss it with me? Does Adam Tomkins think that the UK Government should come to the table to have that discussion? Yes or no?

**Adam Tomkins:** The First Minister, in her earlier remarks, said that the question of timing should be for this Parliament. That is not how we did it in 2012 or in 2014. The question of timing was agreed between the Scottish Government and

the United Kingdom Government. I would have thought that the First Minister would remember that, given that her signature is on the Edinburgh agreement.

The Edinburgh agreement was based on a number of clear and firm principles. It was not a free-floating compromise that rested on nothing more secure than the shifting sands of political expediency. It was a principled agreement, based on a sober and mature understanding of the right constitutional way to go about the business of secession. It said that an independence referendum had to be fair, clear, legal and decisive.

That is the second reason why the Prime Minister was right to reject the SNP's unilateral demand for a second referendum. An independence referendum triggered by the First Minister's dismay at the result of the UK's decision to leave the European Union could not fairly be held until two things are clear and settled: how the UK's new relationship with the EU will operate and what an independent Scotland's relationship with the EU would be. Would we be required to take steps to join the euro? Would we be required to join the Schengen free movement area? How would compliance with the Maastricht convergence criteria impact on Scotland's £15 billion deficit? What would happen to the border with the rest of the UK?

Those are just some of the questions that require to be asked and answered before any demand for a second independence referendum can reasonably be acceded to. As we saw repeatedly last week, Scottish ministers are nowhere near being able to answer any of those questions. They are clueless on the currency, at sea on Schengen, in denial about the deficit, and bewildered by the border. They are unable to answer even the most basic questions about the proposition that they seek to put before the Scottish people again.

That brings me to my final point about consent. No new independence referendum should be contemplated in Scotland until a clear majority of Scots want one. Poll after poll after poll after poll shows not only that there is no such majority, but that the clear majority of Scots do not want to go through this again. These are the words the First Minister needs to hear: "We are the people, and we said no and we meant it."

15:16

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** I remind members that I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. I thank Adam Tomkins for the European

constitution lecture. He might get a bit of a modern studies lesson from me this afternoon.

Presiding Officer, behind where you sit right now are people, or the outlines of people. That was what Miralles intended when he designed this building. My modern studies higher class once told me they were more reminiscent of vodka bottles and, although I told them that I could not possibly comment, there was, nonetheless, powerful imagery implicit in that.

The eyes of the nation and the world are on Scotland right now, watching.

I know from my friends who are working hard at the chalkface in modern studies classrooms the length and breadth of the country that their pupils are transfixed. Today and tomorrow, they will be paying close attention. They will have been taught about the additional member voting system, which is a cross between first past the post and proportional representation, and is a much more democratic system than first past the post. It affords smaller parties a fairer share of the vote and was designed to guard against majority government—indeed, it has been successful in doing so in four out of the five elections we have held since the Parliament reconvened.

Presiding Officer, you might have noticed that we do not all agree about Scotland's constitutional future. However, today's debate should not be conflated with the yes or no arguments from 2014, like a bad remake of "Friends" with Gordon Brown playing a not-so-funny version of Chandler. The debate has moved on and the goalposts have been shifted, against the wishes of every single political leader in Scotland.

We made a choice as a country in 2014 and we all live with that choice every day. However, our manifesto commitment was clear. It stated that, if there was a

"material change in ... circumstances ... such as Scotland being"

dragged

"out of the EU against our will",

that would be a ground for a second independence referendum. It is hardly a state secret. We are the Scottish National Party, after all.

**John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** Will the member give way?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I would like to make some progress, thank you.

I suppose that the press pack, watching from on high in the press gallery, think that the debate is a fait accompli. Unionist parties will say no, pro-indy parties will say yes, and then we will wait and see

what London—which yesterday “forgot” to inform Scotland that article 50 will be triggered next week—has to say to it. Yes—we are in a partnership of equals, all right.

Commenting in *The Guardian* in June 2015, Ruth Davidson said:

“I actually don’t think, in the longer term, Westminster saying ‘No you cannae’ will play well in Scotland, and I think that it would damage the unionist cause.”

I say to Ruth Davidson, who grew up in my constituency, across the hill from me, that, on that point she was absolutely correct. Ruth Davidson is, of course, of a different generation to me.*[Laughter.]*

**Ruth Davidson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Come on—wait for it. In fact, we are four generations apart, if we go by Kezia Dugdale’s maths skills. What about today’s generation? What about the kids who are growing up right now, across the water, ten minutes from where I and the leader of the Opposition grew up? In 2013, statistics showed that 27 per cent of children in the Mid Fife and Glenrothes constituency were living in poverty. Only parts of Glasgow recorded worse figures. In Buckhaven, where the leader of the Opposition went to high school, that figure stood at 38 per cent, with almost four in 10 children living in poverty. Scottish Government figures that were published last week reported that roughly 260,000 children are living in poverty nationally. That is an increase of 4 per cent from last year.

What is the cause? John Dickie, who is director of the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, has described the figures as “devastating”. He stated last week that the

“statistics are a stark reminder why”

the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer

“needs to end the freeze on family benefits and reverse cuts to Universal Credit for working families if the UK Government’s rhetoric on supporting ‘ordinary families’ is to mean anything.”

Today’s debate—*[Interruption.]* Today’s debate matters to those children.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Graham):** There is a wee bit too much mumbling around the chamber. Can I hear the member, please?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Today’s debate matters to those children; it matters for their future and it matters for their ambitions and aspirations.

Earlier this month, I attended the official opening of the new Levenmouth academy—a school that would not exist were it not for £25 million of direct

Scottish Government investment. The Deputy First Minister told pupils:

“Every young person who comes in to the door of this school has the right to expect the best possible start in life”.

That is not a political statement.

**Oliver Mundell:** Can the member confirm that that school has enough teachers, unlike schools in the Deputy First Minister’s constituency?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I will be taking no lectures on education from the Conservative Party, which is seeking to provide selective education in England and to divide people according to ability. *[Interruption.]*

When the pupils at Levenmouth academy leave school, they might be lucky, as Ruth Davidson and I were—they might leave for the big smoke to study at university or college. But what about jobs? In recent years, my constituency has suffered disproportionately at the hands of Tory austerity. Since the independence referendum, we have had job losses in the offices of Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs in Glenrothes in October 2014; at Velux windows in the town, also in October 2014; at the Tullis Russell paper mill in June 2015; at Proclad manufacturing last March; and at Clydesdale Bank in Leven, in January.

I was in Glenrothes yesterday afternoon, and as I was walking through the Kingdom shopping centre I could not help but reflect on how the town has changed—the now pawn shops, the discount bargain stores, and the empty shop fronts—from when I was growing up. The Fraser of Allander institute has estimated that a hard Brexit could cost 80,000 Scottish jobs within a decade and could cost working folk an average of £2,000 in their wages. I will not go back up the road to my constituents and pretend that the status quo is delivering for them. That is patently not the case.

If MSPs vote tomorrow against the Government motion, they are merely meekly capitulating with Tory austerity. It is the “Roll Over Beethoven” school of politics and, to be quite frank, Scotland deserves better.

I say this to the pupils who are studying right now for their final exams, finishing their added value units and preparing their assignments: “Remember this. The political parties of Scotland will vote on Wednesday, and the outcome of that vote will determine your future and the opportunities that you will have when you leave the school gates.”

We in the Scottish National Party say that power should always rest with the people, so let us wait and see who in this Parliament is brave enough to let the people decide on Scotland’s future.

15:23

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank Jenny Gilruth for confirming that it is SNP policy that four years represents a generation—so here we go again. [*Interruption.*]

In her opening speech, the First Minister said that she regrets that we are here. The reality is that she is delighted that we are here. The truth is that she has not stood up for Scotland's interests; she is standing up for her and the SNP's interests by pursuing another referendum. She talks about the will of Parliament, but she ignores the will of the people of Scotland while trying to hide behind the so-called will of Parliament.

Why did the First Minister ignore the will of Parliament when it came to cutting local NHS services? Why did she ignore the will of Parliament when she criminalised football fans with the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012? Why did she ignore the will of Parliament when she wanted to damage our environment with fracking? Why did she ignore the will of Parliament when she wanted to abolish the Scottish funding council? Why does she continue to ignore the will of Parliament regarding her continued failings with our education and healthcare systems? At every single step along the way, she has ignored the will of this Parliament when it suits her.

I thank the Greens for supporting us on all those issues I mentioned; they are important to the people of Scotland. However, when it comes to the crunch, as the budget vote showed, the Greens will always seek to protect the yes alliance first and Scotland second. It is a party that is meant to be environmentalist. It has campaigned for climate justice. The truth is that Patrick Harvie is a nationalist first and an environmentalist second.

**Patrick Harvie** rose—

**Anas Sarwar:** I will happily take an intervention.

**Patrick Harvie:** Mr Sarwar needs to decide whether he acknowledges that we challenge and vote against the SNP on issues that matter to us, or whether he thinks that we are just going along with them on every issue. The two cannot both be true.

Does he not acknowledge that the Labour Party bears some responsibility for where we are now, given the lacklustre remain campaign from Jeremy Corbyn, after Labour voted in favour of the reckless EU referendum and then handed the UK Government a blank cheque Brexit?

**Anas Sarwar:** If the member wants to talk about lacklustre campaigns, Nicola Sturgeon spent the entire campaign going to the rest of the UK and

attacking the remain campaign. That was Nicola Sturgeon's contribution to the debate.

When it came to the budget, Patrick Harvie voted for cuts to communities right across the country.

I say to every single SNP member, "Stop pretending that you have been dragged into this referendum debate because you are so passionate about the European Union. If you believed that being in favour of leaving the European Union would help the case of independence, you would argue for that, because you believe in nothing except independence."

The SNP talks about democracy. Nicola Sturgeon talks about democracy. The truth is that we have had two referendum debates and the nationalists do not accept the result of either one of them. They want democracy only when it suits them. All that they care about is independence, at any cost.

Let us also talk about the day job. Do you remember, Presiding Officer, that the way towards independence was to demonstrate that the SNP was a competent Government? That is no more the case. After 10 years of this SNP Government, health inequality is on the rise, the attainment gap is widening, the wealth gap is increasing, child poverty is increasing, life expectancy is failing to rise in Scotland for the first time since 1851—I repeat, 1851. That is a record that should shame every single member on the SNP bench, but it does not, because each and every single one of them prefers anger and grievance to using the powers that actually make a difference.

The First Minister talks about anger. She is right—I am angry. I am angry that we have a First Minister who would rather use those powers and the power of her office to seek to divide the United Kingdom and to divide Scotland, rather than transform the lives of the men, women and children of this country. She should be ashamed of herself.

We heard from Bruce Crawford and Patrick Harvie about the type of debate that we need. I will tell members what type of debate we need: one with the truth in it. We did not give Scotland the truth in 2014. The white paper was a fiction—it was a fantasy. It was a wilful attempt by the Scottish National Party not to inform the people of Scotland but to misinform them.

Even if we take Nicola Sturgeon at her word that she is genuinely upset about Brexit, how can that be possible when she wants to multiply the consequences of Brexit rather than minimise them?

Patrick Harvie spoke about the pledge that was given that if people voted no we would remain in

the European Union. That was said for a reason. If we had voted yes in 2014, we would have left the EU at that point. Remember that legal advice that the SNP spent £40,000 on? The possibility of remaining in the EU never existed; we would have left. The SNP wants to talk about grievance, even though 15 per cent of our trade comes from the EU compared to 65 per cent from the rest of the UK.

In closing, I oppose a second referendum because I love Scotland. I oppose a second referendum because I respect democracy. I oppose a second referendum because I want this Government to focus on ending inequality and defeating poverty. I oppose a second referendum because of my Labour values of unity, solidarity and redistribution. I oppose a second referendum because I want to unite Scotland, not divide it. Ultimately—and this is the key difference—I oppose a second referendum because I respect the will of the people of Scotland.

15:29

**Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** I am sure that many of us wish that Mr Sarwar would spend more time opposing the Conservative Party.

When we vote on the motion tomorrow, we will be laying down another milestone in Scotland's story. No one predicted that we would be debating a second independence referendum here in early 2017, but circumstances have changed dramatically. Some proclaim that we have had our independence referendum, that we have had our say, and that we should accept the outcome and move on. In response, I say that we are lucky to live in a democracy, and our democracy does not have an expiry date.

We cannot ignore how Scotland voted in the EU referendum and Scotland's support for remaining in the EU. The UK Government's decision to press ahead with a hard Brexit, which means leaving the single market, and its refusal to countenance a bespoke EU deal for Scotland or even to seriously acknowledge how Scotland voted justifies the Scottish Government's decisions to give the people another chance to choose a different path for our country and to lodge the motion for debate.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the member give way?

**Richard Lochhead:** This week's vote is of Theresa May's own making. She says that she is listening, but there is no sign so far that she has heard a word that Scotland has spoken. The view that Scotland is simply not a priority for the UK Government has been reinforced in the past nine months. The Scottish Government's plea for a bespoke deal and for compromise has so far been completely ignored.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** It seems to me that Richard Lochhead's definition of compromise is to say, "Just agree to everything that we want and everything that we might want in the future, and we might call it a draw."

**Richard Lochhead:** The First Minister has laid out very eloquently the compromises and requests for negotiations that were given to the UK Government and that time and again have been completely and utterly ignored. Indeed, at no point in the past nine months were the UK's chief Brexit ministers able to find time in their busy diaries to give evidence to our parliamentary committees, and we know, of course, that the UK Government forgot to tell the Scottish ministers about the date for triggering article 50.

Scotland is now at a crossroads. Europe and the world have been shaped by nations that have chosen statehood to take more control of their destinies in response to changing circumstances. After several decades of debate about our constitutional status, it is very clear that the will of our people is far from settled. That is evident from the social attitudes survey published last week, which showed that support for Scottish independence has doubled since 2012. Support for independence in this country has doubled in four years.

In these momentous times, we face further intense national discussion. As others have said, that will be difficult for many people. Some of our fellow citizens will have voted to remain in the UK in 2014 and to leave the EU in 2016. They fear that they have the most to lose from another referendum. Others voted yes in 2014 and to remain in the EU in 2016. They will feel that they have the most to gain. Others, of course, voted along different lines, but all deserve another say on our country's future. That is why another referendum in line with the Scottish Government's mandate from the people is the only way forward.

The EU referendum and the UK Government's lack of response to the Scottish result are the trigger and catalyst for this week's historic parliamentary vote. The next referendum will not be a rerun of the EU vote, but Brexit is the most profound illustration yet of why we need to take charge of our own future.

When our country faces momentous change imposed from elsewhere against our expressed wishes, we must turn to the people for guidance. We must give the people a choice: the choice to empower ourselves, to decide to take a different, better path than what would otherwise be forced on us if we sat back and did nothing.

Our relationship with Europe and the rest of the UK will determine the kind of country that we want to live in and our quality of life for generations to

come. Membership of the single market will benefit my constituency and our economy; leaving it will damage them. Retaining the free movement of people, capital, goods and services will benefit my constituency and our country; losing them will set us back.

We need an escape route from decisions that have been taken by a UK Government that, in 2015, won only 14 per cent of the popular vote and had only one member of Parliament elected in this country. Retaining a meaningful relationship with Europe is important for Scotland. The people must be given a choice between maintaining our most important, long-standing ties with Europe or continuing down the hard Brexit road, which only a few short months ago the leaders of all the other political parties argued would spell disaster for our country.

I hope—I pray—that our discourse in this Parliament will rise to the occasion. In the aftermath of Trump and Farage, I hope that we can show the world that we can have a considered debate with competing visions. Let us raise our eyes beyond the short term and look to what each choice means for future generations and our role in the world.

We need to look at the options, not only through the opportunities that we can grasp to build on our many strengths, but through the prisms of our deep-seated challenges, such as the demographic time bomb that others have mentioned. The projections tell us that, between 2014 and 2039, the working-age population in England is set to rise by 13 per cent, but by only 1 per cent in Scotland. With zero EU migration post-Brexit, our working-age population is projected to decline by 5 per cent. With an ageing population to care for, but a shrinking tax base to deliver that care, we need powers over immigration and other areas to secure our future. I ask the other parties how we can do our day jobs with fewer taxes and a declining workforce, given the damage that will be caused if we are completely out of Europe? Furthermore, the Resolution Foundation's study says that we face the worst years for living standards for the poorest half of households since records began and the worst since the Thatcher years for inequality.

Let us give our people the chance to choose a different path. That is why we need this Parliament to vote for an independence referendum. Let us all remember the late poet Edwin Morgan's words at the opening of this Parliament in 1999:

"don't say we have no mandate to be so bold."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** As members will be aware, we have time in hand, so if they take interventions I will give them extra time.

15:36

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):**

I have not heard anyone say anything other than that Scotland finds itself in a significantly changed position. We, on these benches, because of that significant and material change to which the First Minister alluded, believe that the Scottish Government has an unquestionable mandate to take the course of action that it has taken. Likewise, the Scottish Green Party has an unquestionable mandate to pursue the section 30 order on the basis of a conference decision.

People have made many particular points at times, but nothing stands still and we have moved forward considerably. In fairness to Ruth Davidson, she referred to Brexit as "a major challenge" to our country. It is unfortunate that the single market options have been ruled out; it is also extremely unfortunate that there was not a willingness to engage in negotiations.

A number of people have talked about the need to consider the implications of Brexit, and that is what I will do in the brief time that I have. Members might well think that the most appropriate person to consult on the implications of Brexit would be the UK Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, and might take some reassurance from the fact that he said:

"I do my job on the basis of facts".

We know that the PM has repeatedly insisted that leaving the EU with no trade deal is better than a bad deal. However, Mr Davis has admitted that leaving the EU without a deal will lead to new tariffs and other barriers to trade. Although he said that the UK Government

"could not quantify the outcome",

he acknowledged that there would be significant implications if that were to happen.

I will list some of those implications: the loss of financial passporting, the loss of the EU open skies agreement and the possibility of the reintroduction of border checks between the north and the Republic of Ireland. Mr Davis also acknowledged that leaving the customs union could cause delays at customs—that may be the case at the moment, but the situation would be exacerbated—and it would probably cost UK tourists access to free health insurance cards.

When asked whether the Tory Government had made an assessment of the economic impact of all the changes, he said that that

"is not possible to calculate."

He added:

"I cannot quantify it for you in detail ... I may well ... do so in about a year's time"



and insisted:

“You do not have to have a piece of paper with a number on it to have an economic assessment.”

That is genuine frontier gibberish, as far as I am concerned.

We know from a leaked Treasury forecast last year, when George Osborne was chancellor, that crashing out of the EU on World Trade Organization terms could cost the UK 7.5 per cent in lost GDP growth by 2030.

The important issue for me is what all this means for our EU citizen friends and neighbours who are in the UK. The loss of freedom of movement would not be one way, and freedom of movement is key to the Scottish Green Party’s internationalist philosophy. Conversely, using those friends and neighbours as crude bargaining chips fits entirely with the Tory UK Government’s calculated pandering to xenophobes and, lest we forget, with the Labour Party and its now infamous immigration control mugs. The reality is that the UK has taken an unfortunate lurch to the right. Freedom of movement is a fundamental, non-negotiable foundation stone of the kind of Scotland that we want to see.

The implications have already started to show in higher education. Who will apply to university if they are unsure whether they will be permitted to stay, or indeed whether they will be welcome? Applications are down. That is unfortunate, because last year, when I represented the independent group on a joint team that was looking at post-study visas, there was cross-party consensus. Indeed, Liz Smith from the Conservatives was extremely helpful in making representations at UK level. It is unfortunate that that is not where we are now.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** Does Mr Finnie think that the First Minister’s priority is still education?

**John Finnie:** It is for the First Minister to say what her priorities are.

The implications for research funding are already becoming a reality, as is the loss of valuable researchers. As *Times Higher Education* reported yesterday, under the headline,

“Brexit: ‘fantastic’ UK researchers head for Canada”,

the University of Waterloo is recruiting British academics who are worried about their future and their families. It is perhaps not ironic, given that the university is located in Ontario, close to the American border, that it has experienced a similar flow of United States academics looking to move since Donald Trump’s election.

There are broader implications for research into climate change and disease. Science is global, and many of the world-leading programmes in

which the UK is currently involved cannot be scaled down to national level. In such matters there should always be the maximum international co-operation.

Why do we support the timeframe that the First Minister outlined? The Scottish Green Party is deeply concerned that the decision about Scotland’s future and that of our EU citizens should take place before those citizens are disenfranchised—that important point is catered for in our amendment. I hope that our EU nationals all hang around to vote for a positive future, but we know that EU nationals are already leaving. I know of a Polish gentleman who manages a restaurant in Inverness; he is learning German, because he sees his future in that country. He is not going to hang around.

We have a growing ageing population. That is something to celebrate, as members said. The Highlands need to import people, and the Scottish Greens warmly welcome the First Minister’s invitation to people to come and live in Scotland. We know that people who have come are net contributors—although I do not view such things in the light of cold economics. They have certainly enriched our country.

The EU was set up with laudable aims and it would be disappointing if the United Kingdom played a part in its fragmentation.

The timeframe is right, and the details of negotiations will be known. Scotland’s EU citizens can have their say, and the people of Scotland are sovereign, as Bruce Crawford said. There must be an informed choice about two futures. One of those is riddled with uncertainty, with the only guarantee being that the UK’s elites—the bankers, the generals and the public schoolboys—will continue to benefit from the growing inequality that is an essential part of the UK’s DNA. The alternative is a chance to make our own choices—yes, in uncharted waters—and to work together to make social and environmental justice the foundation stones of our future, with a just and welcoming Scotland taking its place among the countless other small independent nations of the world.

15:43

**John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** Last week, the First Minister gave up any pretence of being the First Minister for the whole of Scotland. She revealed herself to be what Conservatives have always known her to be: leader of the SNP above all else, even above the interests and wishes of Scots.

Opinion polls have consistently shown that support for separation has not changed since the EU referendum last year. Poll after poll clearly

shows that Scots do not want another divisive referendum on whether we should remain part of the United Kingdom. The First Minister should be getting on with the important business of improving our public services, but the temptation to have another go at breaking up Britain has proven to be just too great. Last week, Scotland lost its Government and gained a pressure group.

I got involved in politics for a variety of reasons. I wanted to make my community a better place to live. I wanted to make our schools and hospitals as good as they can be. I wanted to improve the lives of the most vulnerable in our society. I wanted to create opportunities for people, regardless of their backgrounds. I wanted to be able to hand over our country to the next generation in a better state than it was in when I was born. However, it is clear that this nationalist First Minister and these nationalist MSPs do not share my aspirations for our country. We have been reminded today, and during these past few months, that the nationalists got into politics for one reason only—to tear Scotland out of the United Kingdom and break up Britain.

Last week, the First Minister went back on her word that the independence referendum was a once-in-a-generation event. The First Minister went back on the Edinburgh agreement that she signed promising to respect the result of the 2014 referendum, and she went back on her pledge that she would call a second referendum only if Scots clearly wanted one. Scots clearly do not want to return to the division of the past.

“To propose another referendum ... without strong evidence that a significant number of those who voted No have changed their minds would be wrong and we won't do it.”

Those are not my words but the words of the First Minister. I would like to know the basis on which she now proposes a second referendum despite what she has said in the past.

The First Minister will have to rely on the support of the six Green MSPs who were elected on a manifesto that explicitly said that, if a second referendum should happen,

“it should come about by the will of the people, and not be driven by calculations of party political advantage.”

That is not a cast-iron mandate; it is weak and narrow-minded political posturing.

Last week, the First Minister's speech was littered with incoherence. The First Minister said that she wants to compromise, but she has been working towards this moment since the morning after the Brexit vote. She set out proposals that, even by her own tests, were unworkable and not in the interests of Scotland. Even when the UK Government has found common ground with the SNP over important points such as access to the

single market, the rights of EU nationals, workers' rights and co-operation over crime and terrorism, the SNP has failed to acknowledge that, ploughing on with its grievance agenda.

The First Minister repeated the claim that Holyrood may lose powers even though the Prime Minister has guaranteed that no powers that are currently devolved will be taken to Westminster and that Holyrood will, in fact, gain more powers post-Brexit.

**Michael Russell:** Will the member take an intervention?

**John Lamont:** No, I will not take an intervention from the minister. Given that the First Minister stood in front of journalists last week and refused to show respect to this Parliament—she took questions from 22 members of the press and not one from an MSP, and she took only four interventions during her speech—I will take no interventions or speeches from the minister

Powers in many areas such as farming, fishing, the environment, climate change and energy, and powers in reserved areas such as immigration, business regulation and employment, will be handed back to the UK but the SNP wants to hand them straight back to Brussels.

My constituents in the Borders voted overwhelmingly in favour of the UK back in 2014, and I see no evidence that they have changed their minds. Indeed, over the past few weeks and months, I have got the sense that, if anything, the Borders is moving towards a more firmly pro-UK position. The impact of leaving the UK would be hardest felt in my constituency, where people regularly travel and work south of the border. The SNP's intention to pursue a separate immigration policy and to be part of the EU internal market means that a hard border would be inevitable. Putting up barriers between us and our largest market makes no sense and would be a disaster for businesses and residents throughout the Borders. What my constituents want is for the SNP to focus on getting the best deal for Scotland as we leave the EU and for SNP members to focus on the day job.

Improving our schools, which is supposedly the SNP's number 1 priority, is needed in the Borders more than anywhere else. The attainment gap is one of the biggest in Scotland, and teacher numbers have plummeted. Pupils, parents and teachers are being let down by a Government that is obsessed with separation from the UK at any cost. The SNP's record in health, policing, economic growth and employment is also very poor, but that is hardly surprising when everything that it does is about independence.

The SNP is not Scotland. It is time that SNP members realised that the country is not with them and moved on to the things that matter.

15:49

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):**

The next two years are hugely important. They will determine what kind of country Scotland will be. It is a privilege to contribute to this historic debate on Scotland's choice and our country's future.

In 2014, unionists promised the people of Scotland that a no vote would deliver faster, better and safer change than separation. The change has certainly been fast, but it has not been safer or better. Before things speed even more dangerously towards a hard-Brexit cliff edge, the people of Scotland must have the right to choose a safer and better future. There can be no question but that Scotland should have a choice. The arguments of those who would deny the people of Scotland that choice simply do not stand up to scrutiny.

We have heard that the decision that was made in 2014 was meant to settle the question for a generation, but democracy does not stand still, nor does the world. The United Kingdom that that generation was promised and voted for no longer exists. The United Kingdom—and Scotland's place within it—has fundamentally changed since 2014. The choice that faces us now is fundamentally different. The people of Scotland should not now be denied the right to make that choice.

We have also heard that we have no mandate to give the people of Scotland a choice, but trading mandates leaves the UK Prime Minister on shaky ground. In May 2016, the SNP won nearly 47 per cent of the constituency vote, which is the highest share of the vote in the history of devolution, and the highest share of the vote in UK terms in more than half a century. The SNP won more seats in May than all the unionist parties combined.

We were elected on a manifesto that explicitly reserved the right to hold another referendum

“if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014, such as Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will.”

The Opposition might try to convince us that we should not honour our manifesto commitment, but it should know how absurd an argument that is. Just last week, the Opposition's Chancellor of the Exchequer received an abject lesson on why reneging on a promise to the electorate is a bad idea. His climb-down was a victory for common sense and a victory for democracy.

I believe that political parties should honour their manifesto commitments, and the SNP is a party that believes that we should honour our manifesto

commitments. Our First Minister believes that our relationship with the Scottish people must be built on honouring our manifesto commitments. That is why, with the endorsement of this Parliament, we will deliver on our manifesto commitment and give the people of Scotland another choice about their future in circumstances that are fundamentally different from those that prevailed in 2014.

**Anas Sarwar:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Ruth Maguire:** Not at the moment.

Lastly, we have heard—this is probably the most disingenuous argument of all—that another referendum would divide our nation, tear friends and families apart, and lead to anxiety and fear. It will do that only if we let it. It is incumbent on all of us as MSPs not to fuel feelings of anxiety and division to further our own arguments, but to lead by example in our communities, in the chamber and online. I know that there are colleagues in the chamber whose deeply held views mean that they will disagree with us with every fibre of their bodies, and I defend their right to do that, but the existence of that disagreement is neither harmful nor divisive. Political differences are healthy and normal; they are the essence and the lifeblood of democracy, and they should be celebrated, not feared.

As the debate continues, all of us have a particular responsibility to lead by example in the language that we use and the way in which we conduct ourselves. As my colleague Bruce Crawford eloquently laid out, leadership is needed. Our First Minister is leading by example. At the SNP conference just last weekend, she implored us to argue

“with passion and commitment, yes, but—at all times—with courtesy, understanding and respect”.

**Oliver Mundell:** Does the member agree that it is pretty disrespectful for the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, Keith Brown, to tell everyone in Scotland who does not agree with the holding of a second referendum that they must be a Tory?

**Ruth Maguire:** I hope that I have laid out in clear language what I think would be an appropriate way to conduct ourselves.

I hope that, whatever our political differences, we can follow the First Minister's example in setting the tone for the debate that lies ahead of us. Language and tone are important: the world is watching us, Europe is watching us, the people of Scotland are watching us.

Let us have a debate about Scotland's future, but let us have it respectfully, and in a way that we can all be proud of.

15:55

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

There has never been a political moment in my life when I felt so relieved, elated and satisfied as when the returning officer in the fishermen's hall in Buckie announced that 58 per cent of the people in Moray had voted no to independence.

I note that, in my first paragraph, I have mentioned the Moray constituency more than the SNP member who represents that area did in his entire seven minutes. He should be ashamed of ignoring his constituents from the local area in today's debate.

In September 2014, I felt relieved as a bitter, acrimonious and divisive referendum was over. I felt elated because the result was correct in my eyes and something that I have been campaigning for for years. I felt satisfied, as I knew that we had a legally binding result that both sides would accept. The matter was closed—a once-in-a-generation result had been declared. The result in Moray was replicated across the Highlands and Islands region that I represent. In Highland, 53 per cent said no. In the Western Isles, 53 per cent said no. In Argyll and Bute, 59 per cent said no. In Shetland, 64 per cent said no. In Orkney, we saw the biggest percentage no vote in Scotland, with 67 per cent rejecting separation.

With that clear decisive result, why are we back here again so quickly? The SNP will tell us that it is because of Brexit—the UK Government had not listened to what the SNP had asked for. The nationalists can say that with a straight face despite the fact that only a matter of hours after the Brexit result was announced, the First Minister was telling the media that she had instructed civil servants to draw up plans for another independence referendum.

Let us face it: if it was not Brexit, it would be something else. They said that if there were more SNP members elected to Westminster, that would make the case for another referendum, or that if Trident was renewed, that would make the case for another referendum. Basically, anything that the SNP can hang its hat on to call for another referendum, it will use. As one of the SNP conference delegates said in Aberdeen at the weekend, "We'll give folk another shot to answer the question—correctly next time." Or, to put it another way, if people disagree with the SNP they are wrong, and it will keep on asking until it gets the answer that it wants.

We have seen in just a week how difficult it will be for the case for independence to be made. Angus Robertson struggled, Joanna Cherry struggled, Eilidh Whiteford struggled; they could not answer the most basic questions that Scots want to know. It is clear that since the nationalists

lost the last referendum, they have not been trying to strengthen their argument; they have simply been working on having that argument again. The SNP defence spokesman said that they could build up a defence force from scratch—what does that mean for RAF Lossiemouth or the Kinloss barracks? What does the First Minister mean when she will not answer any questions on currency at this time but says that it will become clear during any referendum campaign?

**Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):**

There are in fact a number of questions that senior Tory ministers have not been able to answer. David Davis, in particular, was not able to answer a number of questions. Can the member set us straight today? Will UK citizens have the right to healthcare while they are on holiday in Europe? What will happen to the open skies agreement? What about financial services and passporting rights? Can Douglas Ross answer those simple questions about what Brexit will mean for Scotland?

**Douglas Ross:** We have had umpteen debates on Europe at the SNP's request in this Parliament. Those questions are put all the time. Today, I would like to focus—if SNP members will be quiet and listen to an Opposition view—on the independence campaign that the SNP kicked off last week. That is what we are here to discuss over the next two days.

The SNP has had more positions on Europe this week than the Greens have had manifesto U-turns—and that is saying something. What is the SNP saying to people in Moray, in communities such as Lossiemouth or Buckie, who voted to remain part of the United Kingdom and voted to leave the EU? When 49.9 per cent of the people in Moray voted to leave the EU, we know that many of those votes came from the traditional fishing communities such as Lossie and Buckie. How will the SNP mantra—that we do not want to be ruled by Westminster but we do want to be ruled by Europe—play out in Buckie or Lossiemouth or many parts of Scotland?

**The Minister for Mental Health (Maureen Watt):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Douglas Ross:** I have given way a couple of times.

I also want to mention an area of government that is often overlooked when independence is on the agenda: governing. In the run-up to the 2014 referendum, it was clear that the SNP had put all its efforts into campaigning for independence rather than running the country that it was elected to serve. The SNP's priority was more important than Scotland's priorities. It is clear for all to see that that pattern has continued.

My wife is a police sergeant and I see day in, day out the problems that officers and staff face because of the SNP's centralising agenda, which led to a single police force. My sister is an English teacher and I look on with dismay when I see our once-great education system dragged down international rankings by the SNP Government's policies. I spent almost a decade as a councillor on Moray Council and I know how councils throughout Scotland are struggling with budget cuts from the SNP but the same Scottish Government expects them to do more with less.

Tomorrow's vote is a crucial one in our Parliament's history. The nationalists will try to push ahead with another referendum to separate Scotland because they did not get the result that they wanted the last time, but I will vote a different way. I will vote to respect the democratic decision that we took in 2014. I will vote against the SNP and the Greens because I believed the nationalists, who said that they would accept the result of the decision that was taken two and a half years ago, and I believed that it would settle the issue for a generation. Perhaps most important, I will vote against the plans for another referendum to send a message to the SNP Government to get back to the day job and start working for the people of Scotland—[*Interruption*—]not just its separatist agenda—[*Interruption*.]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Let me hear—[*Interruption*.] Quiet. I want to hear the member.

**Douglas Ross:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will go over it again because it is disrespectful for SNP members to shout down others because they disagree with them. [*Interruption*.] I said that, perhaps most important, tomorrow, I will vote against the SNP's and the Greens' plans for another referendum to send a message to the SNP Government to get back to the day job and start working for the people of Scotland, not just its separatist agenda of removing Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom.

16:02

**Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):** Since 23 June last year, Scotland's voice on its place in Europe has been crystal clear, with voters choosing to remain by a 24-point margin. Even so, as the UK Government forged ahead with "Brexit means Brexit", the Scottish Government—to its credit—offered a host of compromise proposals to protect Scotland's place in Europe while remaining part of the UK. Those proposals were ignored by Westminster.

Determined to ensure that the voices of Scottish voters were heard, the Parliament voted against triggering article 50 until a substantive post-Brexit

plan for Scotland had emerged. That vote was ignored by Westminster.

**Neil Findlay:** Will Ash Denham give way?

**Ash Denham:** Not now.

Still determined, all but one of Scotland's MPs in London voted against triggering article 50. They, too, were ignored by Westminster.

Theresa May has spoken frequently about fairness and mutual opportunity and about a unity of interests and solidarity. How can it be fair for Scotland to be so ignored? What opportunities does Scotland gain from being ignored? In what world are unity and solidarity achieved through scorn and neglect?

To give the Scottish people a choice over the future direction and governance of the country is not some constitutional obsession or misguided nationalism. Rather, it is doing what members of the Scottish Parliament are elected to do: standing up for the Scottish people. It is beyond unfortunate that there are members of the Parliament who would neglect such a straightforward and compulsory duty. Labour has become so feeble that not only is it unable effectively to oppose the increasingly hard-right Tories at Westminster, it is now complicit in Conservative zeal to deny a mandated, democratic choice to the people of Scotland.

**Anas Sarwar:** Will Ash Denham give way?

**Ash Denham:** Not now.

So disdainful are the Tories that, if Westminster ever got the chance to remove Holyrood's powers entirely, the Scottish Conservatives and Unionists would hand the Parliament to Theresa May on a silver platter.

**Ruth Davidson:** Will Ash Denham give way?

**Ash Denham:** Not now.

And what is to keep Theresa May from doing that, so reluctant is she to hear the voice of Scotland? That is a question that, unfortunately, we must now ask ourselves. She failed to move an inch in compromising on Scotland's place in Europe; she failed to consult the joint ministerial committee of devolved Administrations before moving ahead with her reckless Brexit plans; and she has failed to reach the agreement that she promised to reach with the Scottish Government ahead of triggering article 50.

Theresa May has talked over and over again about the need to strengthen the bonds of "our special Union." However, it is Theresa May who is tearing those bonds apart at the seams by offering Scotland nothing but failure, failure and more failure. The Scottish people deserve better, and they deserve a free and democratic choice about

how to make things better before all their options are thrown over the cliff edge of Brexit.

Try as the Tories might to muddy the waters, the hard fact is that the SNP was elected on a manifesto—I have a copy of it here in case anyone is still confused and wishes to consult it—that says in black and white:

“The Scottish Parliament should have the right to hold another referendum ... if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014, such as Scotland being taken out the EU against our will.”

**Anas Sarwar:** Will the member give way?

**Ash Denham:** Not now.

We were elected on that manifesto pledge with 46.5 per cent of the constituency vote—a vote share that is higher than that of any UK Government since 1966. If the other parties in the chamber are going to try and delegitimise what is plainly written in the SNP’s manifesto, they may as well tear up their own manifestos right now.

**Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):** The member speaks about delegitimising things. Half a million SNP voters—including six of her colleagues sitting alongside her in the chamber—backed the UK leaving the EU. When will the member commit to representing their views when considering her party’s policy on EU membership?

**Ash Denham:** The member might believe that the SNP does not speak for Scotland, but a party that trailed a dismal second in the recent elections certainly does not.

What we are seeing from the likes of the Tories and Labour is sheer disregard for democracy.

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** Will the member give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is in her last minute.

**Ash Denham:** Today’s vote is merely about giving the Scottish people a choice about the future of their country—a choice that is fully attainable through the powers of this Parliament and is brought about through the democratic mandate of the largest party in the Parliament. To deny them that choice would be unacceptable.

I think that Kezia Dugdale said it well when she said that blocking an independence referendum would be

“categorically wrong ... if there was a compelling sense that the Scottish people want a second referendum.”

On second thoughts, maybe Ruth Davidson said it better when she said:

“If the SNP puts in its manifesto that it has an intention to hold a second referendum, and if it wins an outright majority, I think it does have a mandate to hold one.”

What a shame it is that Kezia Dugdale and Ruth Davidson have, with blatant hypocrisy, turned their backs on the democratic rights of the people whom they represent.

**Lewis Macdonald:** Will the member take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is concluding.

**Ash Denham:** Democracy must be allowed to prevail. Scotland must be heard, and Scotland’s future must be Scotland’s choice.

16:08

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I associate myself with the comments of Bruce Crawford and Ruth Maguire. We should not forget that the reason why we had a European referendum in the first place was because the Tory party was trying to sort out its internal problems over Europe and because of its fear of the United Kingdom Independence Party. However, there is no doubt that, as a result of the fact that we have had that referendum, a debate about the future is taking place across Scotland, the United Kingdom and, indeed, Europe. We have to ensure that that debate takes place in a civil way and that, at its heart, there is respect. We can ensure that by behaving in that way in Parliament and in communities.

In speaking in the debate today, I want to make clear that I very much recognise the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of government that is best suited to their needs. I recognised that during the 2014 referendum and I recognise it now.

Today, the argument in Scotland has shifted significantly from that of 2014. The pace of change is unprecedented right across the world, and here at home there are many unanswered questions and uncertainties that arise from Brexit. I have been consistent in accepting that the SNP’s manifesto in 2016 said that

“the Scottish Parliament should have the right to hold another referendum ... if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances ... such as Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will.”

I have also been consistent in the belief that, where a majority of Scottish people are calling for another independence referendum, politicians should not block that demand—a view that I believe I share with Nicola Sturgeon, who said:

“the ultimate decision as to whether there is a referendum again, when that might be and what the outcome might be are all matters entirely for the democratic decision of the Scottish people.”

She went on to say:

“There can’t be a referendum, and there certainly can’t be independence for Scotland, unless a majority of people in Scotland clearly want that.”

Let the debate be about whether now is the best time to call a second independence referendum, and let us stick to the facts. The fact is that there is not a majority in Scotland demanding a second independence referendum at this time. Indeed, the opposite is the case.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** Does Alex Rowley agree that what the Scottish Government has been calling for is not to have a referendum now but to have it in up to two years’ time?

**Alex Rowley:** Since the Brexit vote took place, poll after poll has shown that there is no appetite at this time for a second independence referendum. Is it any wonder that there is no such appetite at a time when we do not know what Brexit means for our country and for the people of our country? My main argument today is that the Scottish people do not want another referendum at this time. They want us to focus on getting the best Brexit deal for Scotland. They want us to tackle the growing crisis that is consuming so many of our public services and large parts of our economy. Why, then, would I come here today, ignore the majority of the people of Scotland, and vote for a second independence referendum?

**Stuart McMillan:** I thank Alex Rowley for taking another intervention. He will have heard David Davis say last week that there are no costs thus far, because the UK Government has not done any analysis of how much a Brexit deal will cost, so how can we know how much it will cost and how can we get a better deal, or the best possible deal, for Scotland when the UK drags us out of the European Union?

**Alex Rowley:** Stuart McMillan makes the same case that I am making. I have no truck with the Tories. The Tories have created the situation, and it is clear from what David Davis says that they have not got a clue what they are doing. That is why this Parliament needs to unite around getting a better deal for Scotland to ensure that we can get that deal moving forward.

I understand why Nicola Sturgeon has come to the conclusion that she has come to. She has said that

“The case for full self-government ultimately transcends the issues of Brexit, of oil, of national wealth and balance sheets”,

but I do not agree with her. Like many in our country, I am worried about jobs, about the state of our education services, about the massive skills gaps in our economy, about the rising poverty up and down Scotland and about the threats to our economy.

We need a Brexit deal that works for people. We need a Brexit deal that works for Scotland. We must focus on getting the best possible deal for the people of Scotland. We cannot allow the Tories to dictate what its terms look like. All our collective efforts should be focused on delivering the best possible Brexit deal. We cannot leave it to the Tories and Theresa May. We need to unite Scotland around getting the best possible Brexit deal for Scotland.

16:15

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** The motion before us is about sovereignty and choice. It is about giving the people of Scotland a choice in the future of this country. This is a truly historic event.

It is important to remember how we got here and consider how the historians of the future will narrate the events of this decade. A Tory Prime Minister, who was playing games with politics and not expecting to win a general election outright, made a manifesto commitment that he never expected to have to fulfil. His coalition partners dissolved into irrelevance, leaving him holding power that he never expected to have to exercise, with no choice but to hold a referendum that he never expected to lose. A shockingly bad campaign—project fear mark 2—delivered the unthinkable: a referendum defeat. That was despite the warnings from those who had witnessed project fear mark 1 throw away a 30-point lead a couple of years earlier. There were no lessons learned.

When the going gets tough, Tory Prime Ministers get going—out the door. Rather than clearing up the fine mess they had gotten us into, the Eton mess headed for the exit. The new Prime Minister, fresh from six years at the Home Office, where her main achievement was to completely fail to deliver her objective of reducing immigration, takes over the top job with a single aim—reducing immigration. Rather than recognising economic and political reality—the narrowest of referendum wins, two out of four nations opposed to Brexit, the impossibility of reducing immigration without trashing the economy, and the huge value to the UK of the single market—the new regime lurches to the right, tilting at windmills in an attempt to slay the UKIP threat by becoming UKIP. We talk of hard Tory Brexit, but let us not forget what it is. The 2016 referendum did not mandate leaving the single market and it did not mandate a no-deal exit, yet that is the direction we are headed in.

So far, so bad—but it gets worse. The “Scotland’s Place in Europe” proposal offered Prime Minister May a get-out-of-jail-free card. However, she refused not only to recognise the

opportunity that it offered but even to engage. Instead of giving UK businesses the opportunity to continue to trade within the single market from a Scotland still in the UK and instead of grasping the differentiated solution on immigration to give both Scotland and the rest of the UK what they voted for, she continues to recite the mantra “Brexit means Brexit.”

Now we are where we are. We have a secretary of state for Brexit who, after nine months of preparation, has had to admit to a select committee that he has done no work on the no-deal outcome that his boss has stated may be the preferred result of the Brexit negotiations. Not only are we going over the cliff edge without a parachute, the driver of the Brexit bus has not even had a look to see what is at the bottom of the cliff. Meanwhile, individual Tories have turned from being ardent remainers, fully aware of the benefits of the single market, into being born-again Brexiteers, helping to push the bus closer to the cliff edge.

Historians of the future will consider the catalogue of calamities, unintended consequences, short-term opportunism, reactive behaviour, atrocious campaign strategies and failures of Government, and they will fail to understand why the events of these years were so hard to predict for those who were caught up in the middle of the mêlée.

**Neil Findlay:** If Scotland comes out of the European Union and if the First Minister’s plans succeed and Scotland becomes independent, will Ivan McKee support holding a referendum for Scotland to go back in?

**Ivan McKee:** That was a lot of ifs, buts and maybes. I fully support Scotland being a full member of the European Union.

Why was the UK Government so surprised that Scotland, when tied up in the back of the Brexit bus, with its proposal for compromise ignored and its voice counting for nothing—despite the myth of a union of equals being peddled in 2014—decided that it might want to talk about taking matters into its own hands? Historians of the future will fail to understand how a Government that had spent nine months transfixed in the headlights of article 50 and, by its own admission, done no preparation for what might come next expected to deliver a complex exit negotiation and multiple comprehensive trade deals in a time period only twice as long.

**Anas Sarwar:** Will the member give way?

**Ivan McKee:** No, thank you.

The historians will fail to understand the tactical errors that are currently being made.

“Now is not the time,”

means that there is a time. The principle of giving the people of Scotland a say has been conceded and it could never be otherwise. However, Tory troops are sent daily to the media front line to argue against giving the people of Scotland a voice. That is a position that cannot be held.

There will be a referendum. Yet, instead of engaging in a debate on the substantive issues, the Tory Prime Minister has managed to shift the debate on to ground that she cannot hold and into an argument that she cannot win, on timing, on process and on who gets to choose.

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Ivan McKee:** No, thank you.

It would be inexplicable, were it not the latest in a long line of strategic and tactical errors dating back to David Cameron’s cunning wheeze to make a manifesto commitment to a referendum that he never expected to hold in an election that he never expected to win. For the Tories, making mistakes has become a habit.

In hindsight, nobody will be surprised when Scotland elects to excuse itself from the impending shambles and takes the door marked “self-determination”. That route is clearly marked. A Scottish Government manifesto commitment was written with just that eventuality in mind. An election result delivered a mandate. A compromise was shunned and there is a timescale that gives maximum clarity together with time to change course.

The current situation is not of our making and we have worked to find a compromise, but Scotland finds itself at a crossroads. We are faced with a choice of two futures and there is only one way to answer the question. The people of Scotland will have the final choice.

16:21

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** In my maiden speech, I made the slightly pompous comment that we would be the first generation of MSPs that would “not necessarily be defined” by the constitution. Three weeks later, Brexit happened, and I have been regretting those words ever since. However, I stick by the sentiment. Let us be clear about our responsibilities and duties as MSPs. We should not be here—we are failing those who elected us—if we are not addressing the day-to-day issues that the people of Scotland face or the concerns that they have about their children’s schools, their parents’ care, their jobs or their businesses.

There are two points on which the SNP requires to be called out for its shameless hypocrisy: its position on Europe and its approach to the will of



this Parliament. In relation to the EU, SNP policy has always been incoherent—at best, it is ambiguous; at worst, it is contradictory—because Europe has never been a matter of principle for the SNP. Instead, it is a tactic to be deployed in pursuit of the holy grail.

Just hours after the vote on 23 June, the First Minister announced that she would legislate for an independence referendum on the back of Scotland being taken out of the EU “against its will”. Since that vote, Conservative members have been subjected to endless taunts from SNP members on Europe. For months, even those of us who voted to remain were nevertheless described as born-again Brexiteers, and Ivan McKee is still at it. For months, the SNP ignored the 1 million Scots who voted to leave.

**Ivan McKee:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Donald Cameron:** Not yet.

For months, the First Minister repeatedly spoke about protecting Scotland’s place in the EU and, last week, we were told that Scotland needs independence in order to so protect ourselves. With that in mind, would it not be reasonable to expect a full-throated commitment to the EU from the SNP and an unequivocal statement that Scotland would rejoin the EU on becoming independent? However, answer comes there none.

Perhaps—just perhaps—it has dawned on the SNP that the 38 per cent of the electorate who voted to leave might be politically useful after all, especially as a third of them were SNP voters. Therefore, we are back where we began. In a bid to keep both leavers and remainers sweet, the SNP position on EU membership remains not only inconsistent, but utterly devoid of principle. It is a policy as changeable as a Highland summer day.

As if that were not enough, there is more.

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

**Donald Cameron:** I am sorry; I want to make progress.

We are told that it will be a “democratic outrage” if the UK Government rejects the “will of the Scottish Parliament” but, on numerous occasions since May, the SNP Government has routinely ignored the will of this Parliament. Using its own benchmark, the SNP has committed democratic outrages aplenty—on the NHS, on Highlands and Islands Enterprise and on the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012. If we take the SNP Government at face value, it routinely flouts democracy. Perhaps we should be more cynical

and realise that, to the SNP, the will of this Parliament is a fair-weather friend to be used when required and ignored when inconvenient. By picking and choosing when Parliament’s will matters and when it is meaningless, the SNP makes a mockery of the very idea that it claims to hold dear.

We all know where this is heading. Down at grievance towers, or Bute house if members prefer, the UK Government’s stance has already been broadcast as the latest insult to Scotland—the latest slight by Westminster to be exploited. And why not throw in the ghost of Margaret Thatcher, just to get the juices really flowing? The old songs are best, after all—the beats of the old drum. What was Keith Brown’s phrase this weekend? “Scotland against the Tories”. How simplistic; how out of date.

**Joan McAlpine:** The member evokes the ghost of Margaret Thatcher. Is that because Margaret Thatcher polled more votes in Scotland back in the 1979, 1983 and 1987 elections than Ruth Davidson and his party managed at the last election?

**Donald Cameron:** I am grateful to the member for that intervention. I evoked Margaret Thatcher because the First Minister evoked Margaret Thatcher in her column for the *Daily Record* just the other day.

For years, we have put up with SNP members stating that they alone speak for Scotland. With that comes the insinuation that those who do not support independence are somehow found wanting—as if, in some way, we do not love our country enough. The truth is that no one here can claim to speak exclusively for Scotland. However, we speak for those who elected us.

On these benches, we speak for those whose voices the SNP has swept aside in its quest for a further divisive plebiscite. We speak for those who genuinely do not want the uncertainty of another referendum at this time. We speak for the families and for the people in their workplaces and their homes for whom 2014 was a time of unhappiness and discord. We speak for those Scots who reject independence and are dismayed when they find their patriotism questioned as a result, given that their hearts pound just as hard as the most ardent nationalist when it comes to the love that they have for their country. They are the silent majority of Scots who simply want to get on with life, whose voices not only deserve to be heard but must be heard.

The First Minister says that a referendum is necessary so that we can

“decide the kind of country we want to be”.

Let me save her some time. Let me tell her what kind of country we want Scotland to be. We want a Scotland that is united, not divided against itself. We want a Scotland that talks about the health of its people. We want a Scotland that talks about growing the economy. We want a Scotland that talks about the care of its elderly. We want a Scotland that talks about the dreams that we have for our children. Above all, we want a Scotland that can have all those conversations and act upon them, free from the long shadows cast by the division and resentment that another referendum will bring.

16:27

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** Democracy, or demos, is the rule not just of the people but of the common people—ordinary people—not of the public school elites living in the home counties imposing their views on everyone else.

It was Abraham Lincoln, in the Gettysburg address, who spoke of

“government of the people, by the people, for the people”.

He spoke, too, of

“a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that”

all of us

“are created equal.”

We in Scotland shared those ideals in the very reincarnation of this country, when this Parliament first opened after a break of 290 years. We all recall the picture of Donald Dewar amid the hordes of people following him down the Royal Mile, and Sheena Wellington’s movingly lovely rendering of “For a’ that and a’ that”. It is the promise of a new way of governing, one that could indeed be government of, by and for the people, one that would genuinely represent those same people, and one that is a very long way from the Government at Westminster, with its intransigent, tin-eared leader and her refusal even to consider a compromise of any kind. It is like wrestling with a brick wall.

I am not sure what Donald Dewar makes of us all now—for some, undermining the very democracy of this Parliament—but I can hazard a guess about what he thinks of Theresa May.

As we are well aware, the Westminster Government was not elected by anyone in Scotland. Its one MP doubtless represents his constituents and, to be fair, so far as I know, he does not have the five jobs or incomes estimated at about £1.8 million a year of the former chancellor, who is good at making money for

himself but not very good at governing the public purse.

Never mind; that is democracy. We rejected the prospect of independence and voted to stay in the UK by a very small margin. A lot of people felt that the future would be safer that way. We voted to stay in Europe by a margin of about two to one. Look what we have got now. People voted the way they that did last time because they thought that they would be safe within the EU. Where are we now?

Another former US President, Franklin D Roosevelt, said:

“Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.”

**Jenny Marra:** Will the member give way?

**Christina McKelvie:** This Parliament—this Scottish Parliament—is our democratic forum. We especially need it because all those empty words about being a partnership of equals and a family of nations have proven to be hollow. We are the voice of the people because we are the Government of the people. Theresa May has no mandate in this place. To protect and preserve our voice, we must have the right to make our choices for ourselves.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** Will the member take an intervention on the issue of choice?

**Christina McKelvie:** The Prime Minister has made her feelings clear. She does not want a referendum at all, and she especially does not want one before her Brexit—her dog’s Brexit—deal is secured, but it is her Government’s actions that have brought us to this point.

Having to deal with an outcome that most of us did not believe could happen—everybody in this place believed that it could not happen—Mrs May has now embraced it with an enthusiasm that impresses Nigel Farage. What does that say?

That Scotland voted so clearly to remain is evidence of our more informed and involved response to politics. In the run-up to our independence referendum, people learned that they had not only a right to get informed, but a real interest in getting informed.

People in Scotland now know that the vow was a lie. What we got in 2014 was EVEL—English votes for English laws—not respect and not a family of nations. Scottish voters must not be conned by another bout of outrageous and impossible promises made by the no campaign and the born-again Brexiteers that there is a land flowing with milk and honey beyond Europe and

that the age of the empire and the Raj is on its way back.

Our electorate must be given the right to choose Scotland's future—

**Anas Sarwar:** Will the member give way?

**Christina McKelvie:** Now is not the time.

However, we must never for a moment forget our responsibilities to provide genuine, clear and accurate information. There will be no fake news—like some of the rubbish that we have heard today—from this Government.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Will the member take an intervention from a constituent?

**Christina McKelvie:** Of course I will.

**Monica Lennon:** I appreciate the member taking an intervention because I am blocked on Twitter and I have been biding my time. We have talked a lot about respect in terms of tone and factual information. Will the member keep up her record as the politician who retweets “Wings Over Scotland” the most as we face another referendum?

**Christina McKelvie:** That point is really not worth responding to, but if anybody looks at the public record, they will know why Monica Lennon and her abusers are blocked on Twitter.

We felt the brutal squeezing of our budget and especially the vicious and cruel assault of the Tories on social security that these guys in the Labour Party seem to think is okay. We know now that the price of oil has fallen. We are going to see much worse, come the tariffs of anything up to 40 per cent that will be introduced under World Trade Organization regulations.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Surely describing members as “abusers” and making accusations such as we have just heard cannot be in order.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** If you wish to make a complaint, Mr Johnson, I think that you should do so.

**Christina McKelvie:** The member should check the *Official Report*. I did not refer to any individual member, although there is a cohort.

Our free European market of 500 million will not be free any more, and we are already seeing prices rise and the pound fall.

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. We all know that, according to the members' code of conduct, it is unacceptable for an individual MSP to call out another individual MSP, but Christina McKelvie

has just repeated the charge that there was a—*[Interruption.]* Listen, please. She actually said “there is a cohort” and pointed to the Labour members. That is simply not acceptable.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have listened to what has been said. In the heat of debate, members should always treat one another respectfully when there are strong views. The *Official Report* will be checked and we will revert back.

Ms McKelvie—you will have to wind up now.

**Christina McKelvie:** Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

The first choice that we need to make is to make a choice. For me, if the choice is bombs not bairns, I choose bairns; if the choice is demonisation of the sick and the disabled, I choose a full, independent social security system; if the choice is rape clauses, I choose to treat women and children with respect; and if the choice is a withdrawal from the European convention on human rights and the repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998, I choose the Human Rights Act—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have to close, Ms McKelvie.

**Christina McKelvie:** If the choice is abandoning child refugees—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, please.

**Christina McKelvie:** —I choose sanctuary. I choose for Scotland.

16:35

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Given the remarks that have just been outlined, it is with a heavy heart that I come to this debate yet again. I know that that is true for people on all sides of the debate. Those of us who voted no in 2014 certainly did not expect to have the debate again, as we were promised that it would happen once in a generation. From the conversations that I have had with friends and acquaintances who voted yes last time, I suspect that they did not expect to be torpedoed back into this binary question so soon either.

Scottish Labour will vote no tomorrow to a section 30 order for a second referendum, simply because we do not think that a second referendum is good for Scotland. The SNP has argued that, with the Brexit vote, there has been a material change of circumstance, as set out in its manifesto, which gives it the authority to call for another vote.

I agree that, overall, Brexit—although it contains possibilities, as every crisis does—is a shambles;

it was a foolish and irresponsible Prime Minister who visited the EU referendum on us in the first place. However, on EU membership and on Scottish membership of the EU, the case that we made in 2014 remains unaltered—an independent Scotland would find it very difficult to become a member of the EU. With the agreement of all member states required, I fail to see how it would be in the interests of Spain or Belgium, given their own secessionist movements, to grant membership to Scotland.

**Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jenny Marra:** I am happy to take an intervention in a moment.

The economics of the situation do not add up.

**Gil Paterson:** I appreciate the member taking an intervention. Is this project fear again, or is it project fear with a three on it?

**Jenny Marra:** I do not quite understand the intervention, Presiding Officer, so I will continue.

The economics of the situation do not add up. Scotland would struggle to meet the convergence criteria for membership with a £15 billion deficit, and the European Commission said quite clearly last week that Scotland would be required to apply as an accession state and queue up like everyone else. We saw from the television interviews at the weekend that even SNP MPs do not understand their own case for membership of the EU. The idea mooted by some nationalists that Scotland would assume the UK's membership is at best naive—really, they are not living in the real political world.

The thing that most upsets and worries me about the prospect of a second referendum is that it will divert focus from domestic issues. During the last referendum, in a debate at the University of Dundee, I said that Scotland's education used to be the best in the world but that we could no longer make that claim.

**John Finnie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jenny Marra:** In a minute.

Shona Robison dismissed my assertion categorically and accused me of the same thing that she accused me of every time that I raised an issue—talking Scotland down. Wind forward three years, and it seems that I was not far off the mark. We find our First Minister proclaiming that education is now the priority of her Government, with the statistics that roll in making extremely worrying reading for every parent in Scotland. Fewer than half—fewer than half—of primary 7 children in Dundee reach expected numeracy standards, in the face of continual SNP cuts. I say

to John Swinney that the SNP has taken nearly £900 per primary school pupil out of Dundee schools.

We were right, and nobody will tell me otherwise, that this Government's attention was diverted away from people's priorities, and it seems that that is happening again.

I will take John Swinney now.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Do you mean John Finnie?

**Jenny Marra:** Yes—sorry.

**John Finnie:** I am very grateful to Jenny Marra for taking an intervention, but she will have to ask those specific questions of Mr Swinney.

I do not know whether Jenny Marra was present when I spoke, but will she acknowledge that there have already been implications for education with regard to university applications from EU students, and particularly for research, as a result of the decision on Brexit, which has not even progressed yet?

**Jenny Marra:** Yes, I would agree with John Finnie. I said in my opening remarks that I think that the Brexit situation is a shambles. However, the SNP's position on the EU is not clear.

I add that the essential work that we are doing on the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, scrutinising eye-watering deficits in our public services, will also gather little attention as referendum fever builds again.

Friends who voted yes last time and will do so again tell me that Scotland's economy needs radical action and that we need to do things differently. I do not disagree. The inequality that we see in our communities, which was created by post-industrialism, globalisation and automation, is the biggest question for all progressive people and our politics today. It is not specific to Scotland, though, and I believe that it will be made worse, not better, by a second vote.

A few months ago, Peter Scowen, the deputy editor of Toronto's *Globe and Mail*, came to Edinburgh to talk about referendums in Quebec. He told a story that we would be foolish to ignore. Before the first referendum on Quebec leaving Canada, he said that Montreal and Quebec—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Draw to a close, please.

**Jenny Marra:** —were poised on the brink of huge economic success. As a result of the uncertainty that was caused by the referendum, businesses decided to go elsewhere—to Toronto. The second referendum compounded matters. Quebec's economy, he said, has never recovered

from the uncertain environment for business and industry that the secession questions caused.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, Ms Marra.

**Jenny Marra:** To that end, I ask the SNP today whether, if the referendum is held and people vote no again, will it rule out a third referendum? I ask because we can see—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, Ms Marra.

**Jenny Marra:** —what continually asking the question can do.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** From now on, everyone will have to keep to under six minutes, please, or people will not get in.

16:42

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** Not for the first time, I want to speak about my journey—

**Jenny Marra:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

We might want to check the *Official Report*, but it is my understanding that both Christina McKelvie and Richard Lyle got well over seven minutes in the debate. If such latitude is to be applied to some members, it should be applied to all members.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** That is not a point of order, Ms Marra. Timing of debates is agreed by the Parliamentary Bureau and then Parliament. Running of debates is a responsibility of the Presiding Officer.

**Clare Adamson:** I want to talk about my journey—

**Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I have a point of order.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, Ms Adamson. Richard Lyle has a point of order.

**Richard Lyle:** Ms Marra named me, but I have not spoken in the debate. Can we have a ruling, please?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Lyle, for that point of clarification, although it is not a point of order.

**Clare Adamson:** I would like to speak about my journey to the cause of Scottish independence. Growing up in industrial central Scotland, I was the granddaughter of an Irish steel worker who came here in the 1920s and worked at the Dalzell mill in Motherwell—the very mill that was saved by this Government last year with the Liberty Steel buyout. I grew up where Labour Party values were

forged—in Lanarkshire, which was Keir Hardie's home county.

When I was a teenager, I watched on the news miners picketing outside Ravenscraig and our police being used as a tool of the Tory Government to destroy my community systematically, pitting worker against worker and demonising our police force.

**Johann Lamont:** Will the member give way?

**Clare Adamson:** No, I will not. I am not taking interventions. [*Interruption.*]

The police were there to protect us. The Tories destroyed the community, an economy and an industry, which is why I will never trust them to have the interests of Motherwell, Wishaw, Lanarkshire or Scotland at the heart of anything that they do.

**Johann Lamont:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Clare Adamson:** I say to my Labour colleagues that that convinced me that Scotland as an independent nation could have saved its steel industry. In the 30 intervening years, nothing—whether Iraq wars or Tory austerity—has changed my mind.

We are here again. A Tory Government is bent on inflicting on Scotland the economic and social chaos of a hard Brexit. I ask my Labour colleagues, as they examine the shambles of their party down south, whether they are content to leave Scotland to the vagaries of a Tory Government that has used othering to demonise and blame asylum seekers for its economic failures; that deploys the othering of European citizens and fails to give them the simplest of guarantees about their future now and following Brexit; and that has deployed the othering of its own citizens when it has demonised the poor, the disabled and the sick. It others disabled people, subjects them to demeaning personal independence payment assessments and visits destitution on its own citizens. It has the cheek to say that we are divisive when othering is at the heart of its policies.

The Labour Party is content to sit back and allow that to be visited on Scotland.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Clare Adamson:** No, thank you.

The Labour Party knows, as the Liberal Democrats do, that federalism is unlikely because neither party will be in a position to deliver it—possibly for the next 30 years. However, they will leave Scotland to the vagaries of Tory Governments in that intervening time.

The Lib Dems want to give choice to the UK, but not to Scotland. They talk about possibilities, but they should understand that probabilities and likely outcomes come with possibilities. We are talking about the future of our country—not some existential version of Schrödinger's cat, whereby all things are possible until they are observed. The Scottish people are observing, the Brexit box is open, and the cat is about to eat the poison. The way for it to avoid the inevitable is just to get out of the box. It really is that simple.

16:47

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** A First Minister exists to bring the whole country together, but in Nicola Sturgeon we have a First Minister who knows only one way to govern, and that is to pit one Scot against another. It is the politics of grievance and division, and it does not work for our country any longer. Scotland is too vast and too complex a country to be governed in such a way.

After a hugely disruptive period in Scottish and British politics, we saw last week the First Minister's true and calculated response to the United Kingdom leaving the EU. At the very time when we needed politicians from across the country to come together and work together, the First Minister looked to exploit an already difficult and complex situation.

Just look at how she responded to the decision that was taken by voters across the United Kingdom to leave the EU. Just three hours after the result was declared, did she rise to the office that she holds and call for unity and for people to keep a calm head? Did she enter a constructive working relationship with the new Prime Minister to help to protect Scottish jobs and to look to the opportunities that our country will have in the future? No. Instead, she looked to exploit anxiety to try to turn it into grievance and more division, and to take us back to the divisions of 2014. Last week's events have shown the people of Scotland exactly the sort of First Minister Nicola Sturgeon wants to be—one who is not interested in finding solutions, but who wants instead to exploit the issues for political gain.

Just like the First Minister, I voted to remain last June. However, I am also a democrat, and democracy is about how we put our arguments to the people and the manner in which we live by their decisions. I do not doubt that Scotland and the United Kingdom face real and pressing challenges, and I do not underestimate them, as we work to build for our countries the strongest possible political and economic future outside the European Union, but we should be working to help to build the strong trading links that we need with every European country.

Our great—and perhaps unique—strength as the United Kingdom is that we are strong as a country not in spite of but because of our differences. The grievance and division to which the SNP wants to return our country are not of the Scotland that I believe in, and are not of the society that I believe the majority of people in Scotland—often the silent majority of people in our country—want to live in.

In recent weeks, I have met many hundreds of SNP voters who are growing tired of the political games of this Government and First Minister. *[Interruption.]* Many of our fellow Scots who voted SNP in the past are beginning to cast a weary eye over the Government. What about the 40 per cent of SNP voters who voted to leave the European Union? How must they feel to see a Government and a First Minister that is not listening to them?

I listened to what was, for me, one of the best speeches today, from Bruce Crawford, being sadly undermined by what Clare Adamson and Christina McKelvie had to say. However, SNP voters are not our enemies; they are our neighbours. They are good people who want better from their country and their Government and who thought that they were sending MSPs from the SNP to be strong voices in Holyrood for their communities, but got nothing in return but Nicola Sturgeon's voice in their communities.

Last week demonstrated that our First Minister has stopped being a First Minister for all Scotland. We should all regret that. As a country, we need to move forward from the divisions of the past. The United Kingdom has always worked as a family of nations to pull together when we face tough times. That is how the UK works; that is exactly what people across Scotland are calling on politicians across Parliament to do. Our United Kingdom is, at its very heart, a story of friendship and hope during difficult times. Those are the bonds that bind our countries together. We learn from each other; we are there for each other.

There is a longing and a need for real principled leadership in Scotland today—leadership that will bring our country together. There is a longing for us to work together as Parliaments and as Scotland's two Governments to make a success of the decision by voters across the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, and there is a longing for us all to work to build the most entrepreneurial, competitive and successful country in the world. If we are going to achieve that goal, we need to unite as a country, and not be divided even further. Now is the very time when Scotland needs unity.

On behalf of the voters whom I represent across the Lothian region, I give this message to the First Minister today: we in this Parliament might not agree on everything—in fact, we might disagree

on a great number of things—but I know that we can agree that grievance, division, and negativity cannot be the political lifeblood of this country. In 2014, Scotland voted to remain in the United Kingdom. It is time that the Scottish Government started to listen to the people of Scotland.

16:53

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** Listening to colleagues across the chamber has been an interesting exercise in democracy. When the *Official Report* is published, I will definitely read some speeches with great care. I will read Alex Rowley's contribution, not because I agreed with his conclusions, but because of the quality of the argument that he deployed in support of his conclusions, and I will read Bruce Crawford's speech again because of the moderation of his expression and his felicitations.

Ivan McKee delineated an interesting approach, and Adam Tomkins—who is not a man who I have often found myself in agreement with, in conclusion—at least had the decency to argue a case in which step A was followed by step B, which was followed by step C. I see that he has been absent from the chamber for some time. I hope that he, too, will read a number of speeches from the debate.

Jenny Marra talked about how difficult it is to get into the EU, but an interesting thing about the EU is how flexible it is. It took only three months for East Germany to get into the EU, curiously enough. There is also a curious exception in the EU that is relevant to my constituents' particular hatred of the common fisheries policy, which is entirely justified—the SNP has sustained its opposition to the common fisheries policy from 1975 to the present day. There is a full member of the EU that is not in the common fisheries policy, even though it is a coastal state: Gibraltar. It might be a tiny exception, but it shows that democratic societies and institutions are capable of being flexible.

I want to talk a little about why the United Kingdom might now be past the point of recovery. The people who voted to leave the EU in the recent referendum should perhaps take heart from the fact that under the rules for admission to the EU, the United Kingdom could not be re-admitted. The reason for that is article 2, which requires respect for democracy and stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy. Functional democratic governance requires that all citizens of the country should be able to participate, on an equal basis, in political decision making at every single governing level. In the UK, the majority of national politicians are unelected and cannot be dismissed. Therefore, in European terms, the UK is not a

democracy. That should give heart to those who voted to leave.

Of course, there is more to say in that regard when we consider the processes in Westminster. Alison Thewliss, my MP colleague, has discovered that it is impossible for any parliamentary process to oppose a negative instrument. In the case in point, that penalises tax credit applicants who have a third child by requiring them to show that the child was conceived through rape. That is not how a modern progressive democracy should work.

I want to say a few words about fishing, because there is no doubt that people who have interests in fishing were the most antipathetic to the European project—and with good reason. When I came to Parliament in 2001, my first speech was on the common fisheries policy, at a time when we were savaging our fleet at Europe's behest, while the EU was funding the building of new boats in Spain—which were, of course, to fish in our waters. If we get anything out of the position that we are in today, it is the opportunity to reset access to our national waters. The four candidates who stood in my parliamentary constituency in last year's election were all remainers, but we all share a duty to support the interests of our constituents.

**Lewis Macdonald:** Should a second independence referendum go ahead, is it Mr Stevenson's intention to ask the fishermen in his constituency to vote to leave the United Kingdom in order to rejoin the European Union?

**Stewart Stevenson:** I direct the member to "Scotland's Place in Europe", paragraph 127, which sets out that, under our proposed compromise,

"we are clear that under this option we would not remain within the Common Fisheries Policy."

We are being flexible and offering compromise. Would that others would do the same.

Let me say a little about where the UK and Scotland can go from the guddle in which we find ourselves. "Guddle" is the only word for where we are at the moment. In times of crisis, the UK has, on occasion, been bold enough to bring everyone into the room in an attempt to solve a problem. On fishing, the simple point is that fishing would be protected and the arguments would be taken forward if the Scottish fishing minister led the way in debates with the EU. I urge the UK Government to listen to that suggestion. The approach would take a burden off its shoulders and give it time to do other things, and it would help us and ensure that we got the outcome that we require for our fishermen.

16:59

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** We have had a heated and argumentative debate, but one thing is absolutely clear: the SNP's prospectus for a second independence referendum is based on flawed assumptions and confused logic. The SNP claims that it is based on certainty and choice, but the reality is that independence could lead only to more risk and less clarity. That was evidenced by the previous speaker, who talked in confused terms about the EU and whether we had even joined it. Perhaps most concerning is the fact that the SNP is wilfully ignoring what the Scottish people want, which is to leave constitutional uncertainty behind them.

Last week, we had a constructive and insightful debate in the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee in which we discussed the uncertainties of Brexit. It is true that Brexit lays before us a great number of uncertainties. We discussed what the implications would be of trading under World Trade Organization rules, the benefits of the co-operation that we have through European organisations and institutions and how the implications of Brexit would be counted in economic costs, not least in terms of jobs. The reality is that leaving the UK—the single market that we have enjoyed for so long that is four times as significant to us as the EU in terms of trade—presents the very real prospect of Scotland having to trade with the rest of these islands under WTO rules, which Eilidh Whiteford described at the weekend as extremely “damaging”.

What is more, the co-operation that even the independence white paper had baked into it would be brought into doubt because of the dissimilarity between the EU's status and the UK's status. The reality is that independence would not ease those risks or mitigate those uncertainties; it would exacerbate them. We have not had one argument from the SNP benches about how those risks would be ameliorated or mitigated.

**Patrick Harvie:** I suspect that Daniel Johnson and I would agree entirely about the shambles of Brexit and the two-year period of uncertainty that is before us because of it. However, surely it follows that the deferral until after 2019 of a decision about whether the voters of Scotland choose to stay on that path extends the uncertainty—it does not diminish it at all.

**Daniel Johnson:** Independence would increase the uncertainty, because there is no set of circumstances in which Scotland would remain continuously a member of the EU. The fact of Brexit, as unpalatable as it is, is that Scotland is coming out of the EU. What we are discussing here is whether Scotland's status will be differentiated from that of the UK, with the dire

consequences for trade, the economy and jobs that would come with that. If Patrick Harvie accepts that those will be the consequences of Brexit, he must accept that they would be the consequences of independence.

The First Minister described this as being about “informed choice”, but the reality is that the situation this time is more complicated and risky than it was the last time, the economic case for independence is less sure because of the collapse in the oil price and the international context is far less certain. That should not surprise us, because this is just another excuse from the party that believes in only one thing: independence. The SNP has wilfully ignored motion after motion and vote after vote that we have had in this chamber, but this is apparently the historic one. Time after time, it was about having an acknowledgement of our options in the letter triggering article 50—except that the First Minister shot her bolt before the letter was even sent.

We know that this is an excuse when we look at the cartwheels and contortions that there have been in recent days about whether “a generation” was meant and what “a generation” really means. Indeed, it is not clear—there has been no commitment—whether the Scottish Government would even apply for European Union membership. Would it be EFTA? Would it be the EU? We do not know. The reality is that the SNP has spent the past two and a half years looking for an excuse for another independence referendum.

There could be no surer sign of that being the case than the rhetoric that we have heard from SNP members. Despite the pleas from members such as Ruth Maguire and Bruce Crawford for a dignified debate, we have had insult after insult from Ash Denham and Christina McKelvie. We have had grandiose rhetoric from Jenny Gilruth and Richard Lochhead, who talked about the “eyes ... of the world” being on us and about “Scotland's story”, as well as Ivan McKee's “historians of the future”, but not one member has answered this question: is it a good idea? Is it worth doing?

**Members:** Yes.

**Daniel Johnson:** Well, SNP members have not been making that case in their speeches, have they? It is a little bit late—it is already past 5 o'clock.

The reality is that we are two years on from the last independence referendum and we have no new ideas from the SNP. All we have is stuttering from Joanna Cherry, who cannot even begin to answer questions on currency. Jenny Gilruth laid out a picture of industrial decline—the situation is serious and we need to tackle it—but she did not say one word about how we would tackle the 11



per cent budget deficit and the £15 billion-worth of cuts that we would need to make.

**Ruth Maguire** *rose*—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is closing, Ms Maguire.

**Daniel Johnson:** What would be the impact on the Scottish economy and on Scottish industry of those cuts?

The SNP argument on the EU is flawed. The SNP argument on certainty is flawed. The SNP argument on the compromises that it has made is unclear. The SNP cannot even be clear about where it stands on the EU. Labour stands against a second independence referendum because we need to put division and divisiveness behind us, because it will distract from the reality of the issues that we need to deal with, such as industry and education, and because it will increase the risks and uncertainties, which will only be counted in the cost of jobs to Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** With regard to the points of order that were made earlier, I have now read the *Official Report*. The issue is clearly a matter between members, which they might wish to discuss among themselves. I reiterate that passions are running high, and I remind all members to treat one another with respect.

17:06

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** I will try to be as respectful as I can in such an important debate.

Despite the best efforts of the First Minister, we now find ourselves in the process of having another referendum on Scottish self-determination. During the last referendum campaign, support for yes climbed from 27 to 45 per cent, partly because people realised that continual Tory Government was becoming increasingly likely as a result of the continuing demise of the once-great Labour Party. This time, the spectre of continual Tory control at Westminster is not a likelihood but a certainty.

I want to discuss two things. The first is the importance of the decision that we make to our future generations. When people of my era go into the polling booth to vote for or against self-determination for Scotland, they will have to consider the impact that their vote will have for the future of sons, daughters, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and children they do not even know. They will have to decide whether they want to leave a legacy of a future in which our children will get to work, study and live in Europe and make their own choices, including the mistakes that they will undoubtedly make, or one in which their future will be decided for them by a Government that is

run by people who do not even care enough to protect and welcome unaccompanied children from war zones.

Kezia Dugdale said that she hates what the Tories are doing to Britain, yet the end result of the course of action that she is proposing is that she will make sure that the Tories continue to do that to Britain.

**Kezia Dugdale:** I am genuinely listening to what the member has to say. How will the poorest people in his constituency benefit from independence when we face a £15 billion deficit?

**James Dornan:** Any deficit that the Scottish Government ends up with when we become independent will be one that was run up under the union that Kezia Dugdale seems to be so proud to be a member of.

While Scottish Labour seems to be content to forever side with the Tories, at Westminster Corbyn and his colleagues say that they would allow a referendum to take place, because even they understand that the will of the Scottish people is to be respected—although, to be quite honest, given how much disarray the Labour Party is in, I will not hold my breath on that position.

If my memory serves me correctly, Kezia Dugdale and Alex Rowley said last year that they were supportive of the Scottish Government's efforts to maintain a relationship with the EU. Earlier, Anas Sarwar said that he wanted truth. Here is some truth. On poverty and the NHS, I do not see how Kezia Dugdale can say that an independent Scotland would be a worse outcome than living with a Tory Government at Westminster until 2030 and beyond, which is what is predicted to happen. I have watched Labour abstain on vote after vote at Westminster on legislation that would have protected some of the poorest in our country. It appears that Scottish Labour would rather stay in an unholy alliance with the Tories than do what is right for the people of Scotland.

I listened very carefully to Alex Rowley's speech, and I thought that the tone of it was great. I agreed with a lot of what he said, but I cannot see how he can come to the conclusion that, under Westminster, we are going to get a good deal for Scotland. We are talking about a Westminster Government that refused to speak to the First Minister or listen to anything that she said in the run-up to article 50 being announced. It is a Government that refuses to take into consideration anything that any of the devolved nations have done. Why would he think that, if we say no tomorrow night, all of a sudden it will start to listen to us and think about the other nations in the United Kingdom? It is just not going to happen.

That brings me to the party on my left—the Conservatives. I have a wee comment here: you

do not get a referendum for free; you have to earn it. If the Greens and the SNP get over the line and make up a majority that votes in Parliament, they will vote through a referendum, and that is what democracy is all about—it is perfectly simple. That is what Ruth Davidson said, so what has changed? Nothing—except that Ruth sees that she might have a future elsewhere if things go badly here.

When a Prime Minister talks about playing politics, she should remember that it was her predecessor who called the leave/remain referendum in order to stave off the UK Independence Party and appease his own Eurosceptic MPs. There was no demand for a referendum on Europe, yet here we are. Theresa May herself warned that Brexit would be a disaster before she changed her spots to suit her own political games and ambitions. She knew that, should David Cameron and the rest of the pro-Euro group lose the EU referendum, it would be

“fatal for the Union with Scotland”.

If Theresa May and the Tories knew that Brexit would be catastrophic for the union, which they claim is so dear to them, it is no wonder that Scotland is flabbergasted at the utter disregard that it seems to be held in when it comes to negotiations.

Nicola Sturgeon, Mike Russell, Fiona Hyslop and the rest of the Scottish Government have made it very clear that they would be willing to work, listen and engage, but the devolved Administrations seem to be snubbed at every turn. Just yesterday, as some of my colleagues have highlighted, the devolved Administrations were left to find out the trigger date for article 50 on the BBC. That is simply not good enough. How often do we hear the phrase “a partnership of equals”, yet how often can it be displayed that that is simply not the case.

It is not for me, the SNP, the Tories or indeed any other party to decide the future of Scotland. While the United Kingdom faces uncertainty and economic instability, it is for the people of Scotland to decide how this country moves forward. I will be voting for independence, should we be given a choice, because I believe that the debate is about what kind of Scotland we want to be. However, I thoroughly believe that, no matter how people vote, that choice belongs to the people of Scotland. Their future should be one that is decided by them and not one that is made for them; that is why I am supporting the Government’s motion.

17:12

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** For once, I take no pleasure in taking part in a debate

in the chamber. Thanks to the kingmaker and his sidekicks—with their incredible biodegradable manifesto commitments—who are apparently already in the pockets of the SNP, the debate’s outcome may already be decided, but I wanted to have the opportunity to speak up for the majority of Scots, who are sick and tired of the Government continually putting its pet obsession ahead of actually governing Scotland and ever sidestepping its responsibilities—it is a Government of smoke and mirrors.

This week, we are having two days of debate on the issue, because after two years and the largest democratic vote in Scotland’s history, we apparently need further debate.

**Joan McAlpine:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Brian Whittle:** Not just now.

In the end, this is an illusion: sound and fury, signifying nothing. Nothing is exactly what is being achieved today: nothing to tackle preventable ill health; nothing to support the NHS; nothing to improve education for the next generation; nothing to support farmers who are still waiting for farm payments; nothing to address poor economic performance; and nothing to justify Scotland being the highest-taxed part of the UK. In other words, there is nothing about issues that are genuinely important to the people of Scotland.

The Scottish Government may have given its motion the title “Scotland’s Choice”, but this is not the debate that the majority of Scots would choose. Contrary to the latest constitutional myth dreamt up by the SNP, Scotland does not face a choice between independence and Brexit. It faces a choice between pragmatically dealing with the situation that it finds itself in as the result of democratically held votes or being dragged by the SNP Government into yet more distracting, demoralising and toxic arguments about an issue that does nothing to address the real problems that Scotland faces.

I did not vote for independence and I did not vote for Brexit, and yet somehow the First Minister feels that she has the right to take my remain vote and the votes of more than 1.5 million Scots as a signal to hold another independence referendum. I am certain that my ballot in the EU referendum did not say, “Remain, and if I lose, I am happy for the Scottish Government to ignore my vote in 2014 and use my remain vote to put party-political interests above the interests of Scotland.”

The Scottish Government appears to live in a world where any instance of things failing to go its way is an excuse for a referendum. It is one thing to be a sore loser, but it is another for the SNP to ignore the result and twist reality to suit its own narrative. The idea that the 2014 independence

referendum was somehow invigorating and enlightening does not resonate with me. Many more Scots may have been engaged in politics, but it was the politics of division. The SNP continues to drive and cultivate that division for its own ends.

**Ruth Maguire:** Will Brian Whittle give way?

**Brian Whittle:** I remember being in the better together campaign reception through the night, watching the results come in. I was relieved when we realised that our union would remain intact, but my overwhelming feeling was sadness. My one and only conversation with Jim Murphy—I do not know whether members remember him: a tall guy who was the future of Scottish Labour—was when he put his hand out to me and joyously proclaimed, “We’ve won.” I looked him in the eye and said, “What have we won, Jim? My country is torn in two. How do we go about fixing that?”

The SNP and its cohorts were comprehensively defeated, but I suggest that nobody won. How can anyone realistically claim victory against a backdrop of such huge division and discord?

**Ruth Maguire:** Will Brian Whittle give way?

**Brian Whittle:** Regrettably, here we are again. We need to recognise that, when it comes to the SNP, nothing else matters. It is a case of independence no matter what it costs Scotland and the Scottish people. The SNP will use any excuse, real or invented, to leverage its obsession.

How can the Scottish Government justify returning to the issue so quickly? What was supposed to be a once-in-a-generation issue was allowed to lie for less than the lifespan of the average goldfish. Speaking of creatures with short memories, I suggest that we insert a new definition of “generation” into the dictionary. It should be something along the lines of, “The period of time equal to however long it takes Alex Salmond to forget that he made a promise”.

**Ruth Maguire:** Will Brian Whittle give way?

**Brian Whittle:** I entered the Parliament less than a year ago with the hope that I would have the opportunity to discuss health, education and the rural economy, to bring different ideas to the chamber through constructive dialogue and to help in any way possible to shape a better and brighter future for Scotland. However, I quickly came to appreciate the huge weaknesses of the SNP Government. They are laid bare for all to see in every debate and with every question put to it that remains unanswered.

**Joan McAlpine:** Will Brian Whittle give way?

**Brian Whittle:** The chamber hosts a never-ending game of SNP buzzword bingo: Westminster, Tory austerity and Brexit. No matter

what the topic or the question is, the rhetoric is always the same. It is always designed to cultivate division in Scotland and between Scotland and the rest of the UK, as well as to stoke up grievance and resentment. It is a case of independence no matter what the cost is to my country. The SNP has nothing else to offer, nothing of substance and no original thought.

The philosopher and poet George Santayana said that a fanatic is someone who redoubles his effort when he has forgotten his aim. The First Minister has forgotten her aim. It is clear that whatever the SNP’s most recent manifesto said about health, education and dealing with the issues of importance to the people of Scotland was all hastily thrown together to disguise the fact that the SNP is a party with no aims for Scotland beyond independence.

**Joan McAlpine:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Ms McAlpine, please let this be a point of order and not an interruption disguised as a point of order.

**Joan McAlpine:** The member just called the First Minister a fanatic. I regard that as unparliamentary language that is against the Parliament’s standing orders. Will you give an opinion on that?

**The Presiding Officer:** I am not sure that that is exactly how Mr Whittle described the First Minister.

**Brian Whittle:** You are absolutely correct, Presiding Officer. That is not what I said.

The SNP may want to talk about how a second referendum may or may not work so that people begin to think that it is inevitable. We will not play that game. It is not inevitable and it should not happen. The SNP should take it off the table, because the people of Scotland do not want it.

**The Presiding Officer:** I suggest that, if members do not wish to take interventions, that is up to them. Please do not continue to pester a member for an intervention if they are not taking one.

17:19

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** Since entering the Parliament, I have campaigned for constitutional change based on the principle that powers should be devolved for a purpose, which is to create a co-operative, progressive and socialist society. There is little point in having powers or repeatedly calling for them and not using them when we get them. However, that is what we have seen on taxation, social security, procurement and

many other areas in which the Government is failing our citizens.

In the 65 public meetings that I spoke at during the 2014 referendum campaign, I argued for a federal system of government where power is devolved to the most logical and appropriate level. I want Government and public bodies at local, national and supranational levels to use their powers to create full employment, rebuild the public services that civilise our society, provide homes for all our people and end the scandal of 260,000 Scottish children living in poverty.

As we have seen, devolving power does not mean that progressive change follows. That requires political will, hard cash, the redistribution of wealth and power and a commitment to face down the corporate and new establishment interests that control Scottish society and the economy.

In 2014, we had a referendum that was spoken of as a once-in-a-generation event by the former First Minister and the current First Minister, even though they now perform verbal gymnastics or resort to amnesia to disown their words—although the camera never lies. On numerous occasions, I have heard the current First Minister demand that, if there is a majority in the Parliament for having another referendum, the will of Parliament must be respected. However, such an argument applies only when it suits her case. Where was that great champion of parliamentary democracy when the Parliament defeated her Government's policies on fracking, NHS cuts, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, council funding, the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012, failing education policy and local government cuts? I will give way to the First Minister if she can tell us why she takes one view when it suits her argument but, when she is defeated, she rejects democracy. *[Interruption.]* Come on, tell us. Not a movement from her—that tells us everything.

Did the First Minister change her policy after those defeats? No, she ploughed on, regardless of the Parliament. Let none of us take any lectures from her about respecting the will of Parliament when, by her arrogant belief that she can do no wrong, she has shown nothing but contempt for the Parliament.

What about her little helpers in the Green Party? They have repeatedly claimed to stand on the moral high ground on many issues and have claimed that they are the champions of democracy and that the Green Party does politics differently from other parties. However, at the budget, the worst negotiators in history sold out public sector workers and council services at the first opportunity and, now, they rip up their manifesto, which said that, if a new referendum were to

happen, it should come about by the will of the people and not be driven by calculations of party-political advantage. That is another sell-out. At this rate, Mr Harvie will be declaring his undying love for Donald Trump.

Last Tuesday, the SNP policy was to remain in the EU; the following day, it was to join EFTA; on Saturday, it was the EU; and now, according to the former First Minister, we are back to EFTA. Is it really the Government's plan for powers to be returned to this Parliament from Brussels only to be handed back to Brussels again? Let us save ourselves time and—as with the West Lothian question—start calling that the Alex Neil question. If an independent Scotland was to rejoin the EU, it would have to commit to joining the euro at a future date and—most worryingly of all—accept a 3 per cent budget deficit threshold. Scotland has never been asked whether it wants to be a member of the EU so, if there is a referendum, we will need clarity from the Government on that issue.

Can the First Minister tell us how public services would be paid for under her independence plan, when there would be no Barnett formula to give us more than £1,000 extra per head? How would services be paid for with the oil price at the level that it is at now? How would they be paid for with the 3 per cent budget deficit threshold that the European Union demands?

People want a job, they want good schools for their children, they want to live with care and dignity in old age and they want to live in clean and safe communities. The energy, time and budget of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament should be focused on those things and not on another two years of constitutional wrangling.

I believe that all of us want to live in a better society, but socialism and nationalism are two very different political philosophies. As a socialist, I want to live in a country that retains UK-wide fiscal redistribution, a united trade union movement and social solidarity that is based on class, not nation.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call our final speaker in this afternoon's debate, Michael Russell.

17:25

**The Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe (Michael Russell):** As a nationalist, I welcome the re-emergence in the past five minutes of better together. To see Ruth Davidson and Neil Findlay get together is to see a marriage made by Brexit.

Bruce Crawford made one of the best speeches of the afternoon—

**Neil Findlay:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Mr Russell should withdraw that remark because, as he knows, I voted remain in the referendum.

**The Presiding Officer:** That is not a point of order, yet again.

**Neil Findlay:** It is on the record.

**Michael Russell:** Allegedly, so did Ruth Davidson.

Bruce Crawford's speech was right not only in its tone but in its conclusion. This debate will have to be concluded. It will have to be concluded by debate and by the exchange of ideas, because there are three positions in the debate.

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the member give way?

**Michael Russell:** No, I am not taking an intervention.

There is a position that Scotland will leave the EU with the rest of the UK on the hardest of Brexit terms. There is a position that we will leave the EU, with the UK, in a negotiated settlement. There is also a position in which the Scottish people will decide.

In order to have that debate, however, we must have clarity, and this has also been a debate of three confusions, all of which have been sown by the Tory party, so I shall try to clarify them. The first is a confusion about what a manifesto is. According to the Tories, a Green manifesto must be observed to the absolute letter, an SNP manifesto must be abandoned completely, and their own manifesto commitment—yes to the single market—must simply be forgotten. However, that is not quite as entertaining as the Lib Dem manifesto, which, according to Willie Rennie, is about to be delivered and is on its way. Do not hold your breath.

The second confusion is a confusion of Governments. If we listen carefully to the debate, we discover that an extraordinary double standard is being applied. The SNP Government has a First Minister who has painstakingly tried to get a Brexit compromise. It is set out in "Scotland's Place in Europe", and I know how painstaking her approach has been. She has tried to get a Brexit compromise while leading a highly successful and popular Administration. I would be happy to list her achievements, but it would take me longer than my six minutes, I am sorry to say. However, after 10 years in office and still with around 50 per cent of the vote, apparently she is not doing her day job and is obsessed with independence to the detriment of the legislative programme, among other things. According to the Tories, she is interested only in her own political party.

Yet, astonishingly, the UK Government has a Prime Minister who has rejected compromise, who creates division, who will not negotiate, who is presiding over a collapsing health service, a divided and class-ridden education system, the most expensive universities in the world and the highest-taxed part of the UK, who has made the worst ever cuts to local authorities, and who has, because of Brexit, abandoned almost the entire Westminster legislative programme, and apparently she is doing her day job. In addition, she is supposedly working in the interests of her nation, not her party, and she clearly has the support of the Labour Party too. That is the second confusion.

**Liz Smith:** Will the member give way?

**Michael Russell:** No, I will not give way.

Both those confusions are bad enough, but there is also a third and very serious, alarming and damaging confusion. It is exemplified by Adam Tomkins, who is apparently an expert on constitutional law, and who bawled at the end of his speech, "We are the people, and we said no and we meant it."

Professor Tomkins is not the people and neither am I. We are the Government and they are the Opposition; that is the situation. The Opposition is entitled to vote and argue against anything—Donald Cameron was absolutely right about that—but it is not entitled to veto it. The Tories have got themselves into a situation about that and Ruth Davidson got herself into that situation when she appeared at an ill-thought-out press conference with a UK Government minister to say that the Tories would veto the Scottish Parliament's decision—if it decides to vote for the motion tomorrow.

It is worse than that. Such a veto would be vetoing not just a majority vote in this Parliament but a manifesto commitment. Apparently, both those things can be vetoed because there is now a new Davidson definition of democracy, which is that everything must have the approval of the Tory party, either here or in Government at Westminster, even though it has only one out of the 59 Scottish MPs and even though it is a small minority in this Parliament. That is alarming, because it is antidemocratic. That is unacceptable in a democracy. An Opposition does not have a veto.

**Liz Smith:** On that point—

**Michael Russell:** No.

When the Parliament comes to consider and vote on the motion tomorrow, the judgment will be either that the Parliament's will, expressed through majority and manifesto, prevails, or that it is

vetoed by an Opposition. That will tell us whether the Tories are a democratic party or not.

Bruce Crawford was absolutely right: division is caused by people, not debate. We need to find a way to bring this debate to a conclusion, and we now know—and this parliamentary debate shows us—that the only way to do that is by allowing the people to have their say. [*Interruption.*] It does not matter how often Ruth Davidson shouts, that is the crystal clear conclusion that anybody will draw from this debate.

**Ruth Davidson:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Michael Russell:** No, I will not.

The debate must come to an end, and, given the dangers of hard Brexit and the reality of the situation in which all attempts at compromise have failed, there is only one way to bring that about, which is for the people to vote. Those who are against the people voting are not democrats.

**The Presiding Officer:** As members will know, the debate will resume tomorrow afternoon.

## Decision Time

17:32

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** There are no questions to be put as a result of today's business. The decisions on the motion and the amendments that have been debated today will be taken at decision time tomorrow.

I remind members that if they have spoken in the debate today, they should be present tomorrow for closing speeches, which are due to begin at 4.43 pm.

## Loneliness

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-03950, in the name of Rhoda Grant, on triggers for loneliness. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the growing interest in dealing with the problem of loneliness, including in areas of the Highlands and Islands; notes the launch of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness; welcomes the publication of *Trapped in a bubble: An Investigation into the Triggers for Loneliness in the UK* by the British Red Cross and the Co-operative Group; notes the biological, psychological and behavioural impacts of loneliness; believes that the problem of loneliness requires a society-wide response, and notes the calls on the Scottish Government and others to take action on this issue.

17:34

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I thank all those who signed my motion for their support in bringing this debate to the chamber. I also thank the Co-operative Group and the British Red Cross for their "Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK" report, which highlights the issues of loneliness and which led to tonight's debate.

It might seem strange to some that the Co-op is involved, but it has a rich history of community work and that is what makes co-operatives stand out. Scotmid, which is headquartered in Edinburgh, supports hundreds of community groups around Scotland, including ChildLine. In 2015, the Co-op asked its members to identify an issue that they wanted to pursue. They voted to tackle loneliness and the Co-op chose the British Red Cross as its partner. Funds were raised—exceeding the £3.5 million target—to tackle the issue. The report was published and they are now looking to develop projects, of which five are in Scotland and two are in the Highlands and Islands region—in Brae and Inverness.

I also thank the Co-operative Party and the many other organisations and individuals who took time to send briefings or to write to me to share their experience.

We all assume that loneliness impacts in old age, usually as a result of bereavement or illness. However, the report looks at several different groups, including young mums, people with mobility limitations, people with health problems, those who have recently divorced or separated, people whose children have left home, retired people and those who have been bereaved.

What surprised me was that some of those things could be seen as positive developments—for example, the birth of a child or the freedom of retirement—but they are also life changing. They can change a person's social circle and identity. With the birth of a child, a person becomes a parent instead of being an individual, and their priorities change, which puts them out of kilter with their social network. Retirement can mean freedom, but many of us are defined by what we do.

The report found that being lonely has biological, psychological and behavioural impacts. While we can understand the psychological and behavioural impacts of loneliness, it is not fully recognised that loneliness has biological impacts on a person's health. The impact of loneliness can be linked to cardiovascular health risks, increased death rates, high blood pressure, signs of ageing, symptoms of depression and the risk of dementia. At the extreme, loneliness is linked to suicide.

The report concluded that there was a lack of support available. There appeared to be stages of loneliness, from the disruption of a life-changing event to someone's ability to adapt to that. It found that 79 per cent of people experience loneliness at some point in their lives. We need to recognise the triggers and to ensure that advice and support are available at key stages in life—for example, at the birth of a child—to avoid loneliness becoming extreme. We need to look at the different stages of loneliness and provide support to overcome it, for example lunch clubs and social outings for older people, and befrienders for those who cannot get out easily.

When loneliness becomes chronic, more organised interventions are required to address the harms that loneliness has caused. It takes time to build confidence, but there are many organisations that can help. We are getting better at recognising the triggers. Many employers now recognise the need for transition into retirement and they help their staff to adapt.

With people moving to find work, traditional family structures are no longer in place, which leads to isolation and loneliness for old and young. Some people juggle supporting ageing parents with helping to bring up grandchildren only to find that both roles disappear from their lives around the same time, leaving them with a lack of purpose and empty days to fill. We all need to be needed, to feel useful and to have a role to play.

Befriending Networks, in the summary report on its 2015 health and loneliness roadshow, concludes:

"There was a widespread perception among participants that any practice currently aimed at tackling loneliness happens mostly by chance".

It goes on:

“Nor is there currently any formal commitment from local or national government to develop strategies or dedicate funds to reducing, let alone preventing, the alarmingly high levels of loneliness documented in the research.”

The Jo Cox commission on loneliness was set up after the MP’s death to examine ways of tackling loneliness and it is a fitting addition to the work that she started. Jo Cox was passionate about tackling loneliness, which she put down to three issues: an ageing population, changing family structures and a Government policy of inadequate care services.

There is a lack of support for the voluntary sector, yet voluntary organisations run many wonderful projects. Some organisations that try to do that are small and local, and others are large national organisations. Examples include friendship services in Inverness; the Nairnshire mentoring service, which is part of Arthritis Care Scotland; the Leanne Fund in Stornoway, which provides support for young people with cystic fibrosis who are leaving home; befrienders throughout Scotland; mother-and-baby and mother-and-toddler groups; carer support groups; and many more—the list is long. They are run by volunteers who give their time to care and support those who face loneliness as they try to fill the gaps that Government has left.

The Jo Cox commission has highlighted the need for people to be proactive. Its start a conversation campaign seeks to make us all part of the solution by taking time to speak to a neighbour or family member who is alone. We can take it further.

Caroline Abrahams of Age UK said:

“a simple thing like saying hello and having a chat can brighten up an older person’s day.”

Sadly, Scotland’s modern culture does not encourage spontaneous conversations with strangers—more is the pity, because we all lose out. One of the things that I love about going door to door is the conversations that we have, which are not all about politics. We get a short insight into the lives of some wonderfully colourful individuals.

The voluntary groups that I have talked about are just examples, and I am really sorry that I have missed out so many, but that shows the range of organisations that are trying to meet the needs of people of all ages who are affected by loneliness. We need people in all walks of life to identify people who are at risk of loneliness and to signpost them to support before it impacts on their health.

We also need Government, local and national, to play its part. It needs to support voluntary

groups and to help co-ordinate their efforts, as well as identifying where gaps exist.

We need to consider the funding of services. Voluntary organisations tell us of the problems of planning and delivering services on a year-to-year funding basis, and we need to give them more security. We also need to consider service provision for groups of people who are vulnerable to loneliness to ensure that every new mum is signposted to a playgroup and every old person has access to social interaction. We need to recognise that a five-minute care visit does nothing to alleviate loneliness, and to recognise that social interaction is as important as being fed and dressed.

The voluntary sector is doing its bit. We need Government to support it, and we all need to play our part by starting a conversation.

17:42

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Rhoda Grant for securing the debate. She is a long-standing campaigner on an issue that touches many lives in all our communities. As Jo Cox herself said,

“Young or old, loneliness doesn’t discriminate.”

From the child who is bullied at school to a new mum to a pensioner who has outlived their husband or wife, the feeling of loneliness can hit any one of us at any time in our lives. That is a key point, as Rhoda Grant said, which the “Trapped in a bubble” report by the Co-op and the British Red Cross, which is referred to in Rhoda Grant’s motion, revealed. The report also revealed that

“Over nine million people in the UK”

across all adult ages are either

“always or often lonely.”

A survey by Action for Children found that 43 per cent of 17 to 25-year-olds who used its service had experienced problems with loneliness, and less than half of that same group said that they felt loved. The charity also reported that almost a quarter of the parents who were surveyed said that they were always or often lonely. Age Scotland, with its excellent Christmas campaign—no one should have no one at Christmas—revealed that almost 50,000 older people in Scotland faced Christmas day alone. Loneliness and isolation are a stark reality for around 100,000 older people living in Scotland today.

As the Co-op and the British Red Cross point out, the causes of that loneliness are complex. As Rhoda Grant highlighted, it is often caused by a trigger, such as divorce, poor health, retirement or bereavement.



Our community can also have an impact. For example, poor transport links in a rural area can add to a person's feeling of loneliness and isolation, and the very society that we live in today can be a driver, with people working longer and living in a more antisocial way. As a result of that, the solutions can be equally complex in their variety. As the research by the Co-op and British Red Cross found, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to tackling loneliness.

In the very short time that I have, I want to focus on one group: older people. The Jo Cox commission spotlights that group as being at greater risk of loneliness and isolation. I will highlight the work of one organisation in my region and the lessons that we can take from that work in tackling loneliness. The organisation is the Food Train, which I suspect is familiar to many members. It was established in 1995 by Labour Party stalwart Jean Mundell after a community survey of older people found that many were struggling with their weekly grocery shopping. A partnership of local shops and volunteers was formed to do older people's shopping and deliver it to their homes. The success of the service saw it expand beyond Dumfries thanks to funding from the Scottish Executive, and by the time that Jean sadly passed away in 2006, the service was operational across Dumfries and Galloway.

Recently, I had the privilege of joining Food Train for the day and helping the amazing volunteers with their deliveries. I am delighted to see that, just beyond its 21st birthday, Food Train has expanded across Scotland into West Lothian, Stirling, Dundee, Glasgow, Renfrewshire and North Lanarkshire. As well as expanding its geography, Food Train has expanded its services by adding Food Train Extra, which is an additional home support service.

More recently, it has added a third service called Food Train Friends, which is an award-winning befriending service whose volunteers help those who are experiencing isolation and loneliness through telephone contact, one-to-one home visits and group outings and activities. The concept is simple, but we should not underestimate the difference it makes to the older people whom the volunteer befrienders reach out to by taking them out, simply having a chat on the phone, or popping round for a coffee. That work has a hugely positive impact on people's wellbeing and happiness.

Frankly, such work could be life saving, because we know that loneliness kills. Loneliness increases the risk of mortality by 10 per cent and it has been likened to a 15-a-day smoking habit. It increases stress, anxiety and depression, and it doubles the risk of dementia. It manifests itself in physical health by raising blood pressure, thus contributing to heart disease, stroke and sometimes cancer. It

can also impact on our behaviour and reinforce or exacerbate problems such as alcohol misuse. That impact on health was recognised by the Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee's excellent 2015 inquiry into age and social isolation, which led to the Government committing funding and to a later cross-party commitment to develop a national strategy.

When the minister sums up, I hope that she will be able to update members on when we are likely to see that strategy. I also hope that she will give a commitment that providing greater support to the voluntary sector, which delivers befriending projects such as Food Train Friends, will be at the very heart of that strategy.

17:47

**Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):** First, I thank Rhoda Grant for bringing forward this important debate.

Loneliness is a serious issue in society, but because it is behind closed doors, it is sometimes ignored and does not often receive the attention that it deserves. I welcome the work that was done by the British Red Cross and the Co-operative Group on their report; I also welcome the launch of the Jo Cox commission on loneliness.

The British Red Cross and the Co-operative Group have compiled an important piece of work that highlights loneliness and informs us just how widespread the issue is right across parts of society that we do not normally associate with it. The report highlights, correctly, that loneliness is something that anyone can feel. As the report states,

"loneliness can happen across life stages, genders, and backgrounds and is not solely connected with later life."

The report usefully gives statistics on those who deal with loneliness, and helps us to identify the types of support that people say that they want, which tend to be face-to-face services. A classic example of that relates to advances in medicine. I recently had to deal with a case in my role as chair of the integration joint board in Argyll and Bute. Advances in medicine meant that there was a reduction in the number of visits that nurses made to people who live in rural areas. Instead of attending to a person's needs twice a week, the nurses went only once a week, which meant that they saw that person only once. That had a detrimental effect on people's lives and shows that such advances can have good and bad outcomes.

An organisation that I work with is doing great work. Legion Scotland offers a befriending service for veterans of all ages and their families right across the country. Service personnel and their families move around a lot and the lifestyle that they live is very different from that of much of

society. When they leave the services, they can struggle because they do not share life experiences with those who have not served in the forces. They might not have many ties to the local area that they move into and think that no one understands them, and that leads to loneliness for many.

Legion Scotland does something that is very important in combating loneliness: it introduces veterans to other veterans so that they have someone in the local area with similar experiences to talk to and socialise with. That is just one organisation that I know of and deal with; there are many others doing brilliant work, but they need more support.

The type of work that Legion Scotland does can be extended to other groups who are facing loneliness but are sometimes ignored when it comes to dealing with the issue, such as young new mums or people who have recently been divorced or who have separated—all groups that were highlighted in the report.

It is incredibly important to people to have someone to talk to who is going through or who has gone through the same things. Knowing that they are not the only one going through loneliness can bring great comfort.

The other course of action that the report highlighted was the smaller, simple acts that we can each take to help to combat loneliness in our society, such as speaking to our neighbours, family and friends and just asking how they are. Such acts are simple but they can have a massive effect. Starting a conversation is one of the things that the Jo Cox commission wants to do. I hope that, as individuals and as members of this Parliament, we can lead the way and set an example in helping society to fight loneliness.

17:51

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I congratulate Rhoda Grant on securing a debate on an issue that is so significant in contemporary Scotland. I am sure that everyone in the chamber has experienced loneliness at some point in their lives, but what happens when loneliness becomes a chronic condition?

We are all aware that there is a clear link between loneliness and poor mental health, with lonely individuals increasingly prone to depression and even suicide. One study has shown that lonely people have a 64 per cent greater chance of developing clinical dementia.

However, let us not forget that loneliness can also affect physical health, with research showing that a lack of social connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes per day. In

fact, loneliness is associated with an increased risk of developing coronary heart disease, diabetes and strokes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sorry to interrupt, but could you move your microphone closer? Thank you.

**Kenneth Gibson:** That obviously has an impact not just on individuals but on society itself—how compassionate we are as a society—and, more prosaically, on our public services, as lonely individuals use more medication, have a higher incidence of falls and have increased risk factors for requiring long-term care.

When considering the factors that lead to social isolation, it is easy to forget how many social connections we experience through something as simple as going to work—sharing a smile with a fellow commuter, having a coffee with a colleague, or even arguing with our boss. It is therefore understandable that a major life transition such as bereavement, the diagnosis of a serious health condition or retirement could trigger loneliness.

Thankfully, we are now more aware than ever before of the effects and causes of loneliness, which means that we are beginning to see effective, targeted action to support lonely individuals in our communities. We must celebrate the positive work of organisations such as the three towns and Largs OIR groups in my constituency. These groups offer opportunities in retirement to the over-50s, building on the skills and voluntary contributions of their members. They offer a wide range of activities, from French lessons and hill walking to ballroom dancing, that enhance the mental and physical wellbeing of all their members.

To make them even more effective, such grassroots community initiatives are supported by Scottish Government policies and actions to tackle social isolation nationally. By developing partnerships between Scotland's public services and the third sector, we can design a cohesive strategy that is informed by the opinions of the people who need our services the most.

We must also address the mistaken belief that loneliness is a problem that touches only older people's lives. As the British Red Cross and Co-operative Group report demonstrates, loneliness can affect anyone at any stage in life. In fact, in 2010, a report by the Mental Health Foundation found that loneliness was most common between the ages of 18 and 34. It is harder for people in that age group to seek support, as they are mostly too old to access youth services and too young for initiatives that engage with the elderly population.

Isolation by smartphone and the internet is a growing problem. Young disabled people as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender teens

and those from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to experience social isolation. Chronic and persistent bullying has been known to cause intense loneliness, reduced self-esteem and increased social anxiety in later life. Despite the social media myth that we are all more connected than ever before, many of our young people struggle to develop meaningful relationships and connections that allow them to feel supported and part of a community. That is why the Scottish Government has committed to training all teachers on equalities issues to increase their confidence in tackling prejudice-based bullying. In addition, in 2017-18, we will see spending on Scotland's mental health services exceed £1 billion for the first time. We can further develop positive strategies by including young people in the dialogue on social isolation and loneliness.

I trust that the Scottish Government will continue to recognise loneliness as a public health priority. I encourage everyone in Scotland to speak openly and honestly about mental health and to support one another in our communities.

Once again, I thank Rhoda Grant for bringing the debate to the chamber.

17:55

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** I am happy to contribute to a very important debate. I declare an interest as a Co-operative Party member who is supported by the Co-operative Party as an MSP. I congratulate Rhoda Grant on securing the debate and on the way in which she outlined the challenges that the report represents.

I welcome the report by the Co-operative Group and the British Red Cross because it highlights the important issue of loneliness. That speaks to the co-operative movement's job not being simply to say how much it cares about things, but to identify practical solutions. The Co-operative Group has engaged its members and employees in this practical but very important issue.

We know that, in polls, people rate fear of loneliness in old age as being second only to fear of dementia. It is something that perhaps troubles us all as we get older. What will life be like in our old age? Loneliness is part of that sense of concern.

We know from our own experience, and from speaking to other individuals, the impact that loneliness and social isolation have on people's health and wellbeing, and on their very sense of themselves. It is not just that people are lonely; it is also hard to admit to being lonely. There is a sense that it shows a deficit in oneself—that the person has not managed to organise their life in such a way that they have people around them. People's feeling of not even wanting to ask for

help or to admit the problem is part of the challenge that we face in wanting to address the matter. There is a sense of failure such as all of us might have felt at some point in our lives—in this case because the person has failed to make connections with others.

It is important to highlight, as Kenneth Gibson did, that loneliness is not just an issue for elderly people. Significant life events can cause loneliness—divorce, bereavement or retiring and no longer being in the workplace. It can happen even at points when we would imagine that loneliness would be the last thing that a person would feel. Young mums, at the very point in their lives where they have a new wee person to look after, can feel separate from others and feel that people do not understand the challenges that they face.

The report is very important in that it highlights that loneliness can be experienced in all sorts of places and at all sorts of times, and that we should all be alive to that fact. It also identifies practical things that can be done. It recognises a role for employers in supporting employees at times of stress and difficulty, whether they are due to bereavement or anything else.

A very practical thing that the Co-operative Group suggests is that the people who work in its funeral business should reach out to people who are bereaved and tell them about support groups and folk from whom they might want to take comfort. Others could draw on that suggestion, as well.

The issue, I think, is one of community, because we know what is in our communities. There are churches, community groups and strong neighbourhoods where people look out for other people, but perhaps some people fall through the net.

We want to celebrate the work of the third sector, but we also have to recognise that those groups can fall by the wayside in tough financial times. The lunch groups, the person who takes a person out to the library or makes sure that they attend church are the things that go by the board. That is why I believe that it is short-sighted to target local government for cuts, because cuts work their way through to this problem.

Something as simple as reorganising the bus system to make it rational for the person who owns the bus company might mean that an elderly person will no longer use the bus and go out, because doing so might involve two or three journeys rather than one. People can retreat from the organisations that might support them.

There are questions about awareness and about resources, but it should be understood that there are, within our communities, people who

want to help. It is essential that such groups are supported in the very important work that they do in addressing the problems of loneliness and isolation. There is also a fundamental challenge to us all, simply as citizens and good neighbours, to do our part to support people who feel isolated or lonely and who might, for the want of a kind word, continue to be so.

17:59

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I join members in congratulating Rhoda Grant on securing the debate.

Members have mentioned the impact of loneliness and social isolation on physical health, and Kenneth Gibson was particularly correct to focus on their mental health impacts. I therefore welcome the fact that Maureen Watt will respond to the debate.

I also join members in thanking the British Red Cross and the Co-operative Group for shining a light on the problem of loneliness and for demonstrating how complex it is. It impacts at the level of the individual. A change in circumstances that might arise from a change in health, work status or whatever can trigger social isolation at any stage.

There are also community aspects. On withdrawal of services, Johann Lamont made a valid point about removal of transport links. I am very well aware that that has an impact in rural areas in particular, but not exclusively.

Societal changes have been referred to. Perhaps there is the assumption that people are better connected now and that the risk of isolation is therefore less than it was in the past. However, that is misplaced.

All those things show why loneliness and social isolation impact on so many individuals of all ages. As the report highlights, loneliness is not just an older person's issue. I have acknowledged that it is also not simply a rural issue. However, as Rhoda Grant's motion acknowledges, there are particular aspects to consider in the rural context: there are certainly aspects in the islands context that are particularly difficult to address and which perhaps need more nuanced and tailored solutions.

I am particularly grateful to the Big Lottery Fund for the investment of £0.5 million last year through the "Investing in communities: supporting 21st century life" programme, and for the five years of funding for the work that Voluntary Action Orkney does in befriending, to which a couple of colleagues referred earlier. That has had a massive impact on not just older members of the community in Orkney, but right through the

generations. It has grown and adapted over the years, and can now be expanded as a result of that funding. The impact that I have seen for myself on individuals, families and wider communities has been nothing short of life changing.

The report very forcibly makes the point that we need preventative, responsive and restorative solutions. The befriending service in Orkney ticks all those boxes, and there will be similar services in other parts of the country. Befriending can be preventative, but even once problems have emerged it can be responsive to them. It can also be restorative, where problems have been embedded for some time. The benefit of the funding that was provided last year and which will last over the next five years is that it will allow Voluntary Action Orkney to take the service out to the smaller isles that have been excluded from it to date. The report talks about the principles of good support. It talks about support that provides a sense of purpose and is local to individuals, free, face to face and has wider benefits for the community. In all those respects, the befriending service is to be highly commended.

I thank Rhoda Grant for securing the debate and allowing the complexities of the issue to be debated. I am sure that we will return to it many times in this session of Parliament.

18:04

**Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** I thank Rhoda Grant for securing the important topic of triggers for loneliness for a members' business debate.

As we have heard, a recent study by the British Red Cross and the Co-operative Group produced some startling findings. For example, more than 9 million people in the United Kingdom reported that they are often or always lonely.

I know that we have heard some of this, but it is worth repeating. Loneliness can be the cause of numerous health issues, including depression and other mental health problems, it can increase the risk of cardiovascular ill health and dementia, and it can lead to problems that create a vicious cycle of poor diet, heavy drinking and increased smoking.

Feelings of loneliness can differ from person to person, and so can the triggers and the effects. The report studied some of the key triggers that result in people feeling lonely. I will talk about some. Mobility issues, especially where there are poor transport links, often mean that people find it hard to get out and meet other people—sometimes to the extent that they give up trying and withdraw further into themselves. Children leaving home is an issue that my friends and I can

identify with. Although it is welcomed by some people, the transformation of a house from a place in which there are younger people, with friends coming and going, to a quieter environment, has been found to trigger loneliness in others.

The loss of a long-term partner through death or divorce is a common cause of loneliness in people of all ages. The situation in which a person who has spent a life and shared a daily routine with someone but then finds themselves alone is not one that I want to imagine. I know that many people discover that friends of the couple turn out to be friends of only one of the partners; the sudden loss of contact with people whom they once considered to be friends has also been shown to contribute to low self-esteem, which is another trigger for loneliness.

The 21st century has brought about a unique set of reasons why people lose normal everyday interaction with other people. For example, there has been a sharp rise in the number of people who opt to work from home. It is no longer necessary to go to the office, which has the result that it is no longer necessary to commute. Stopping off to do the shopping on the way home from work has been replaced by the supermarket delivering straight to the door.

Nowadays, we spend so much time on the internet that it is not uncommon to hear of people in the same house sending each other electronic messages rather than interacting on a human level. That is a very sad reflection of our modern-day society.

Loneliness can affect all age groups—from the teenager who withdraws into the virtual reality of computer games, to people who are on the edge of retirement. Many people count the days until they retire; it is often an eagerly anticipated event that gives people the long-awaited opportunity to spend more time with friends and family. However, for others, it may be the day when they lose contact with people, and when the routine that they have had for years disappears. One man described the day of his retiral as the first day of his loneliness, and another had such a busy working life that his only friends were his workmates.

We are all individuals; we all react differently to events. We are in an age when many people go to work, come home and close the door. Clubs and societies have difficulty attracting new members and gone are the days of the community spirit that once existed in tenement blocks and small villages. Record numbers of people live alone. Although, of course, not all are lonely, the potential for loneliness to grow is clear.

It is sad that we live in a society in which people can feel isolated and alone. I once again thank Rhoda Grant for securing the debate.

18:08

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I, too, am a member of the Co-operative Party. I thank my colleague Rhoda Grant for bringing the issue to Parliament for debate, as well as the British Red Cross, the Scottish Co-op Party, Samaritans in Scotland and Age Scotland for their helpful briefings on the topic.

As we have heard, loneliness and social isolation can be a heavy burden for those experiencing it and can feel like an impossible barrier to overcome. As has been pointed out by members across the chamber, it is in everyone's best interests that we tackle the problem of loneliness. The debate is highly relevant, because the research published by the British Red Cross and the Co-op Group shows that 86 per cent of people in Scotland agree that loneliness is a serious problem.

We are only beginning to understand that loneliness could have as negative an impact on our nation's health as smoking, as Colin Smyth pointed out, and that it carries as strong a risk as obesity. We all know the serious challenges facing our NHS and public services over the next couple of decades due to the increasing pressures of an ageing population. The impact of loneliness in old age is a looming public health crisis that must be addressed. As Mike Adamson, the chief executive of the British Red Cross, said in his foreword to the "Trapped in a bubble" report,

"It's quite clear that loneliness and social isolation is a crisis we cannot ignore, causing untold misery and, ultimately, unnecessary pressure on hard-pressed statutory services."

I therefore welcome the growing attention to and interest in dealing with the problem, especially the Scottish Government's commitment to establish a national social isolation strategy. I welcome Samaritans Scotland's call for the strategy to be cross-departmental and inclusive of external organisations and agencies, and I repeat my call to the Scottish Government to include an evaluation of the suicide prevention strategy.

As Colin Smyth pointed out, a one-size-fits-all approach will not do. There are actions and small steps that we can all take, as individuals, to do what we can to reduce loneliness in our day-to-day lives, but if we are to tackle loneliness and isolation effectively, support must also be given to organisations such as the third sector groups to which Rhoda Grant referred, which deliver targeted support to people who need it, and to older people in particular.

I am fortunate enough to have such an organisation in the area that I represent, Central Scotland. The Lightburn Elderly Association Project—LEAP—provides a fantastic befriending service to older people in South Lanarkshire and runs the hands on project. The service relies on the dedication of volunteers, who befriend older people who are experiencing social isolation. The project makes a difference to people's lives by reducing their isolation, increasing their confidence, developing their friendships and improving their overall mental wellbeing.

Small gestures and the targeted intervention of a volunteer can have a transformative effect. One older person who has benefited from the service, said:

"My volunteer encourages me to get out the house for a wee walk and I am trying to go a bit further every week. I really look forward to her visits and feel less isolated ... and this has made such a difference to my life."

Another said:

"Coming to the men's group breaks up my day and alleviates my depression. I enjoy the great company and support of the volunteer and other men and sharing stories. I don't know what I would do without it."

Those are powerful words.

The focus on isolation among older people is important but, as we heard from Kenneth Gibson and other members, and as the Jo Cox Foundation recognises, it is not just age that can lead to isolation. I recently met Community Volunteers Enabling You, or COVEY befriending, which is based in Hamilton in my area, to discuss the excellent befriending and support work that it does with young people and their families. One young person who benefited from COVEY's work said:

"I can't believe I am now going out again, I never thought I would want to go and do things, but the support has built up my confidence and I now want to get my life back".

I used to be a volunteer befriender with COVEY when I was a student at university, so I appreciate how rewarding the experience can be.

We should celebrate the work of such organisations at every opportunity. I am grateful that tonight's debate and the forthcoming national action aimed at tackling loneliness will drive change.

18:13

**The Minister for Mental Health (Maureen Watt):** I thank Rhoda Grant for bringing this important issue to the Parliament for debate this evening, in the form of her motion, and I thank all the members who have spoken so well in the debate.

There is undoubtedly an increasing awareness and recognition in our society of the importance of meaningful and sustainable social connections for individuals' health and wellbeing. The "Trapped in a bubble" report adds evidence in that regard.

Some members will recall the good work of the previous session's Equal Opportunities Committee in its inquiry into age and social isolation. The committee sought to get under the issues that can lead to people becoming lonely or socially isolated. According to Age Scotland, the inquiry was the first of its kind in the world. That is surprising, when we think about it, and it is a sign that the debate in Scotland is ahead of the curve on this issue, as it is on so many issues.

When the committee's findings were published, I recall that they generated a significant amount of media interest, along with the recognition that social isolation and loneliness are major public health issues of our time.

We also recognise the impact that a lack of social contact can have on the health and wellbeing of individuals, the reality of which is felt across all spaces and sectors of society.

Members who have spoken in the debate have identified that there are many different factors that can trigger loneliness in different people. That is why many voluntary groups set themselves up in their communities. I do not share Alison Harris's doom-and-gloom perception, as there are still many groups in our communities that help to prevent social isolation, such as mother and toddler groups that come out of antenatal classes. Just last week, I visited the Juno project in Sighthill, which is for mums with postnatal depression. Many such groups evolve in our communities.

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I agree with all the comments that have been made so far in the debate. Does the minister recognise that cuts to local government budgets and local communities put the squeeze on third sector organisations that look to the public sector for funding to support people? She mentioned day care to address loneliness, for example. Does she recognise that those cuts have an impact?

**Maureen Watt:** If the member can wait a minute, I will tell him what support we are giving to the organisations that he mentions.

The committee's inquiry made several important recommendations that the Scottish Government accepted. Most importantly, we included in our manifesto a commitment to develop a national strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness in order to address those issues. My ministerial colleague Jeane Freeman is leading on that work and has already had constructive dialogue with many older people through various older people's

organisations. She is also engaging with younger people and other groups in developing the strategy, and a draft for consultation will be published later this year.

Alongside developing a strategy, we have taken practical action. For this financial year, we introduced a one-year £500,000 social isolation and loneliness fund, which focused on supporting grass-roots, community-based projects to tackle social isolation with a range of groups. Thirty-six organisations were successful in gaining grants from that fund. Some excellent work has been done and we will consider the learning that has been gathered from that for future funding arrangements.

More broadly, we have just rolled out three-year funding for equality organisations, many of which do vital work in tackling these issues across Scotland's communities. Our £20 million empowering communities fund is supporting community-led projects to tackle the social isolation that is experienced by older people. We have also supported efforts to strengthen volunteering across Scotland, including with £8 million of funding for our third sector interfaces, which, among other things, are tasked with volunteer development.

I was pleased that Colin Smyth mentioned the Food Train and how it has expanded from Dumfries and Galloway. When I was the Minister for Public Health, I visited the project in Dundee, where students and others are making meals for older people—particularly recently widowed men who have perhaps not been involved in cooking before. I was impressed with that volunteer service, which people really appreciated. I am sure that, like me, other members have men's sheds in their areas, which go a long way towards helping not just men but others. I am a regular visitor to the men's shed in Portlethen, in my constituency.

Rhoda Grant's motion rightly refers to the particular challenges that are faced in the Highlands and Islands. It is vital that the forthcoming national strategy recognises the challenges that exist for those who live in remote and rural communities. Being able to get out and about is a major determinant of whether people are able to build and sustain social connections. I am sure that Rhoda—who, like me, comes from a rural area—knows how much people in those communities support others to get out and about, to get their shopping and to get to appointments.

It is important that we continue to support the concessionary travel scheme for older and disabled people, the funding for which we have increased to more than £200 million in this financial year. The support that is provided to community bus projects is important in that area, too.

There is increasing recognition that, if we tackle issues of loneliness effectively, that could lead to a breakthrough in our preventative approach. As Minister for Mental Health, I am deeply aware of the impacts that those issues have on mental health, which is why we are making close connections between our mental health strategy and our work on social isolation. In relation to what Liam McArthur said, our manifesto commitment on the

“ask once, get help fast”

principle is extremely important. That might be a low-level intervention, such as peer support or putting people in touch with individuals and organisations. The befriending service that Liam McArthur mentioned is important, too.

There is broad consensus that addressing such issues is critical to improving public health and ensuring that people can live longer, healthier lives. We need to look holistically at social isolation and loneliness, and we must offer a range of interventions that create a platform for people to build meaningful and sustainable social connections.

Since the inquiry, stakeholders have continued to champion the importance of this agenda. At the Gathering 2017, which was held last month, Voluntary Health Scotland hosted a seminar on the development of the strategy that was very well attended. Next month, the Scottish Government will bring together a range of stakeholders to inform our thinking and tell us what they think needs to be reflected in the strategy. It is vital that the strategy is developed in partnership with others.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must conclude, minister, or we will overrun our time.

**Maureen Watt:** Okay.

As many members have said, it is really important for all of us—as friends, neighbours, colleagues and human beings—just to say hello. Even a smile helps with preventing loneliness and social isolation.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much.

*Meeting closed at 18:22.*





This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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