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AITHISG OIFIGEIL

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Thursday 2 September 2021

Session 6



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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 2 September 2021

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good morning. I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and across the Holyrood campus. I ask members to take care to observe those measures, including when entering and exiting the chamber. Please only use the aisles and walkways to access your seat and when moving around the chamber.

The first item of business is general questions. In order to get as many members in as possible, short and succinct questions, and answers to match, would be helpful. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or indicate so in the chat function by entering the letter R during the relevant question.

Child Poverty (Impact of Parental Smoking)

1. **Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its assessment is of the impact parental smoking has on child poverty. (S6O-00089)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): Reducing the use of and harm caused by tobacco products is one of Scotland's public health priorities. Given that smoking is more prevalent in our most deprived communities, where there is a greater risk to children and young people from exposure to second-hand smoke, we have set specific smoking cessation targets for our cessation services that are focused entirely on those communities.

Eradicating child poverty is a national mission for the Government, and we will set out further action to deliver at the pace and scale required as part of our next tackling child poverty delivery plan, which will be published in March 2022.

Kenneth Gibson: Billions of pounds have rightly been invested in protecting people from Covid-19 and yet smoking remains a huge killer year on year, with 9,332 deaths in Scotland being directly attributable to smoking in 2018. Given that smoking disproportionately impacts on the most deprived households, and taking into account the health and financial cost to families, what more will the Scottish Government do to help people to quit

smoking, enabling them to improve their health and financial circumstances?

Maree Todd: Mr Gibson makes a good point. Reducing health inequalities and increasing healthy life expectancy are priorities for the Scottish Government, and smoking has been the primary preventable cause of ill health and premature death for many years. In June 2018, the Scottish Government published its five-year strategy "Raising Scotland's Tobacco-free Generation: our tobacco control action plan 2018". The action plan sets out interventions and policies to help to reduce the use of, and the associated harms from, tobacco in Scotland. The plan focuses on the inequalities within groups of people who smoke, the prevention and reduction of the uptake of smoking among young people, and providing the best possible support for those people who want to give up.

The Scottish Government has introduced a 2034 tobacco-free target. Our aim is to reduce smoking rates to 5 per cent or below by 2034, creating a generation of people who do not want to smoke and are protected from the harms caused by smoking. The action plan continues our work on protecting children from taking up the habit of smoking and creating a tobacco-free generation by 2034. In addition, anyone who wants to stop smoking can contact the free national health service stop smoking service, quit your way Scotland. That free helpline provides advice and support, and it can direct individuals to local support services to help them to find their own way to stub out the habit.

Drowning Prevention Strategy

2. **Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it has taken to implement the recommendations in Scotland's drowning prevention strategy. (S6O-00090)

The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham): The Scottish Government takes the issue of water safety very seriously and welcomed the drowning prevention strategy when it was published by Water Safety Scotland in 2018. I thank Clare Adamson for her contribution to the strategy and her continued support for Water Safety Scotland, which has a lynchpin role in this area.

As Clare Adamson will know, the Scottish Government continues to provide funding, via the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, to support the operation of Water Safety Scotland. In addition, this year, the Scottish Government has worked with partners to support a number of water safety activities and campaigns.

We also work closely with Water Safety Scotland and other partners to support the recommendations in its drowning prevention strategy and initiatives that can help to raise awareness of the hazards around water and reduce deaths from accidental drowning. On 11 August, I convened a meeting with a range of key stakeholders to drive further action around delivery of the drowning prevention strategy, and I will convene a follow-up meeting later this month.

Clare Adamson: We were all shocked and saddened at the numerous reports of drowning fatalities in Scotland, including in my constituency, and we send our condolences to everyone who has been affected. It is wonderful to see RoSPA and Water Safety Scotland developing a host of educational resources for schools.

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the right to access education and information on the prevention of accidents for children and their caregivers. What steps will the Scottish Government take to ensure that article 24 of the UNCRC is realised for children in Scotland and that water safety education is promoted across our constituencies?

Ash Denham: I am grateful to Clare Adamson for highlighting the relevance of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is because we attach such fundamental importance to the rights and wellbeing of our children that we legislated to incorporate the convention, as far as possible, into Scots law.

When the Parliament voted unanimously to approve the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill in March, it was a milestone, not an end point. Work needs to be ramped up to ensure that the convention's provisions bring real-life benefit to our children. That applies to the provisions of article 24, on health and wellbeing, which include ensuring that

"all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in ... the prevention of accidents".

Of course, we are not setting off from a standing start. A lot of good work on education around risk assessment and accident prevention is already being undertaken. There is also the underlying contribution of the getting it right for every child programme. We have a very good platform on which to build.

On the prevention of accidental drowning specifically, we will strengthen our work with key organisations, including Water Safety Scotland and RoSPA, to identify and deliver the most effective ways of facilitating access to appropriate education and support.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The minister will be aware of the tragic drownings that have occurred at Loch Lomond this summer; indeed, there are tragedies every year.

Last year, following the tragic death of Ava Gray, I wrote to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to ask it to site a rescue boat at Balloch. Its boat is currently sited at Knightswood, which, on a good day, is some 25 minutes away. I praise the work of the Luss rescue boat, but it is run by volunteers and Loch Lomond is 39km long, so there is a clear need to do more.

Will the minister ensure that the location of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service boat is reviewed as a matter of urgency?

Ash Denham: As I said in my initial answer, a range of stakeholders were present at the meeting that I convened on 11 August. As you would imagine, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service was at the meeting. I specifically asked it to review the location of its assets for exactly the reason that Jackie Baillie mentioned and to look at future arrangements. She was right to raise the situation at Loch Lomond.

However, there is no simple single answer to the challenge of drowning prevention. There is obviously a role for education, signage and life-saving equipment. All water can be dangerous, but Jackie Baillie is right to point out that there are locations where the dangers are more significant, where it is especially important that there is clear warning signage and appropriate life-saving equipment.

I will again speak to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service about the particular incident that Jackie Baillie mentioned and will come back to her.

Antisocial Behaviour (Off-road Vehicles)

3. **Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle the antisocial use of quad bikes, trail bikes and other off-road vehicles. (S6O-00091)

The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham): I am well aware of the risk to public safety that is caused by careless, inconsiderate and antisocial driving. That is why I fully support Police Scotland and its partners in dealing with the misuse of vehicles in an appropriate and proportionate way. Local policing teams are ideally placed to engage with members of the local community to identify where the misuse of vehicles is causing distress to the public. That ensures that those areas can be prioritised for proactive action to prevent future instances and identify and deal with those who are engaged in the misuse of vehicles.

Neil Bibby: During the summer, I have taken surgeries to the streets in my community and can tell the minister that there is growing concern about antisocial behaviour and the inappropriate use of quad bikes and other off-road vehicles, which endangers not only the rider but pedestrians and the wider public. Often, the people who are most affected by antisocial behaviour are the least likely to come forward with concerns. Will the minister meet me to discuss how we can help Police Scotland to make our communities safe and reclaim our footpaths, parks and public spaces from the dangerous, antisocial minority who are misusing those vehicles?

Ash Denham: I would be happy to meet the member to discuss that. On 13 March 2020, I asked my officials to write to all local authorities in Scotland to ascertain the extent to which the antisocial use of motorcycles and quad bikes was a problem in their areas and how they were addressing that. All 32 local authorities replied to that request. The antisocial use of motorcycles and quad bikes is not a widespread problem across Scotland, though six local authorities reported on-going problems with antisocial use of motorcycles or quad bikes in their areas and four said that that was a seasonal occurrence. I would be happy to meet the member to discuss that.

Football (Link Between Heading and Dementia)

4. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to help protect people participating in football activities, particularly children and young people, in light of research suggesting a link between repeated heading of footballs and dementia later in life. (S6O-00092)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): The Scottish Government wants people to take part in sport and physical activity in a safe environment. We are in regular contact with the Scottish Football Association to discuss a range of issues, from developing the game to safety concerns. The Scottish FA produced guidance with Dr John MacLean of the Hampden Sports Clinic, which has provided clubs and coaches with a robust set of guidelines on heading. They are clear that they do not recommend heading practice in primary children's football and there is a set of graduated guidelines for when children reach secondary school.

Audrey Nicoll: The minister will be aware that the legendary Manchester United footballer, Aberdeen born and bred Denis Law, recently confirmed his diagnosis of mixed dementia. He believes that repeated heading of footballs may have played a part in that. Policies such as

Frank's law are an excellent way to ensure support for people who are affected by dementia. Does the Scottish Government plan to build on that landmark legislation?

Maree Todd: I noted Denis Law's announcement that he is suffering from dementia. I am obviously very sad about that, but I think that it is great when people who have the status that he has in society are heroic and stand up to say that they are suffering from this illness. It reduces the stigma and fear for everyone else in the population and I am grateful to him for doing that.

Regarding support for people with dementia, we have been clear that, over the course of this session of Parliament, we will substantially increase funding for the national health service and for social care. We plan to increase public investment in social care by 25 per cent during this session so that, by the end of the session, we will have budgeted for an increase of more than £800 million in support for social care, compared to current spending. That is necessary because those aged over 80 in the general population have a one in three risk of dementia. We must, and will, remain focused on that.

Arts Funding (National Planning Framework 4)

5. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will commit to enshrining a rule in the national planning framework 4, where, for every new building, 1 per cent of the cost is given to the arts. (S6O-00093)

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): The Scottish Government will lodge a draft national planning framework for scrutiny in Parliament this autumn, alongside a comprehensive programme of public consultation. As we set out in our position statement last year, NPF4 will include stronger planning policies to support our creative industries.

Sarah Boyack: Does the minister accept that there is a need for increased investment in our arts and that one way in which we can provide that, which is being used in many countries around the world, is to ensure that a per cent for art regime is in place through the planning system? That will enable local authorities and communities to get the investment that they desperately need not just as they recover from the pandemic but as we see new opportunities across our communities.

Tom Arthur: I absolutely recognise the vital role that the arts and culture play in our communities. Indeed, last week, I visited Dundee waterfront, where we see the transformational impact of the V&A. That is referenced in our position statement, which we published last year, alongside the developments that are taking place in Paisley, which are another example of Scottish

Government investment in the arts and culture supporting regeneration.

The Government is committed to taking forward the per cent for art scheme. This is a complex area that will require consideration, but I look forward to Ms Boyack's engagement on it, just as I look forward to her engagement on the draft national planning framework 4 when it is laid before Parliament in the autumn.

National Health Service Recovery Plan (Mental Health Programme)

6. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its programme for mental health within the NHS recovery plan. (S6O-00094)

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): We published our "NHS Recovery Plan 2021-2026" on Wednesday 25 August and we will update on our programme for delivery of those commitments in due course. The plan commits to ensuring that at least 10 per cent of front-line health spending is dedicated to mental health, with at least 1 per cent directed specifically to services for children and young people, by the end of the current parliamentary session. It also commits to 1,000 additional staff in primary care, meaning that every general practice will have access to a mental health and wellbeing service.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: This week, Audit Scotland shared serious concerns about the way in which children and young people's mental health is being cared for across Scotland. The number waiting more than a year for treatment trebled in the past 12 months, yet the NHS recovery plan says that child and adolescent mental health service waiting lists will be cleared by 2023. Can the minister assure the Parliament that those who are waiting will have access to the best care and that young people will not be parked on medication or referred to online interventions as a means of reaching that target?

Kevin Stewart: So far this year, we have already invested an additional £29.1 million from the recovery and renewal fund in child and adolescent mental health services, in order to help to clear backlogs. Beyond that, one thing that the Government wants to ensure is that folks do not have to access such services in the first place. That is one reason why our investment will look at the wellbeing of children across the board so that no child reaches the crisis point of having to access CAMHS. I am pleased that, as we move forward, there will be a much greater focus on community help in this area, and on using digital sources, including cognitive behavioural therapy online, which can help us to achieve that and prevent children from reaching that crisis point.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): Does the minister agree that supporting NHS recovery with more community and voluntary sector-based therapies for 18 to 25-year olds will help in preventing escalation of mental health issues for a significant number of young people in future? However, what can be done immediately to cope with the demand now when escalation happens? I am seriously concerned that a lack of beds in Lothian for severe eating disorders is denying my constituents acute life-saving treatments that they need. Will the minister agree to look urgently into in-patient mental health treatment provision?

Kevin Stewart: I thank Ms Hyslop for what is a very important question. We recognise that not all young people need specialist services such as CAMHS, which is why we have provided an additional £15 million of funding to local authorities in order for them to deliver locally-based mental health and wellbeing support for five to 24-year-olds in their communities.

I assure Ms Hyslop that I have been in contact with NHS Lothian about the concerns that her constituents have raised. I also want to share with the chamber that we have already committed an additional £5 million of resource to support the delivery of the recommendations of the national review of eating disorder services, with the majority of that funding going directly to health boards because of an increase in presentations of folk with eating disorder requirements. We expect all boards, including NHS Lothian, to prioritise that spend to get it right for patients.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Vaccine Certification

1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Earlier this week, two Green MSPs joined Nicola Sturgeon's Government, taking the total number of ministers up to 29. Did all 29 agree with her proposals to introduce vaccine passports?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): It will be Parliament, next week, that decides whether to introduce vaccine certification. I set out the reasons for the Scottish Government's view on that yesterday. Of course, all ministers—all 29 hard-working, dedicated ministers—are bound by collective responsibility under the ministerial code.

This is a question of how we best continue to control Covid in the least restrictive, most proportionate way. I think that vaccine certification, in the limited way that I set out yesterday, has a role to play in doing that.

Douglas Ross: The First Minister refused to say whether her ministers all agreed at the time of her announcement that they supported vaccine passports. It seems that the coalition of chaos, which the First Minister described earlier this week as "a leap of faith", is already a leap into the dark for the Greens.

The Greens are not the only people in Scotland who have no idea how vaccine passports are going to work. Hospitality groups say that the lack of engagement is extremely concerning. Scottish football clubs have warned that the Scottish National Party's plans are completely unworkable. Industry groups need answers about the scheme before the Government introduces it. Why have they not had that chance?

The First Minister: Perhaps Douglas Ross should, first and foremost, concentrate on what his views on vaccine certification are: whether he supports it or opposes it, or whether he is going to continue simply to engage in the infantile opposition that characterises so much of the Conservatives' response to Covid.

This is a global pandemic. It demands of politicians—particularly those of us in government—really tough decisions, and we have all got a responsibility to live up to that. On the detail, we will produce the detail of how the scheme will work before we bring the proposal to Parliament for Parliament to debate and decide, through a vote, whether we go ahead with it. I say to Douglas Ross that, had I stood here yesterday or even today and announced as a fait accompli exactly how every single aspect of this was going

to operate, he would be here today criticising me for taking for granted the views of Parliament and not giving Parliament its proper place. We will do this properly and we will do it in the way that people have a right to expect of their Government.

Of course, we saw across a range of sectors yesterday an understanding of the reasons for the proposal. Nobody wants any form of restrictions, but, while we have this virus, we have to determine the least restrictive way of keeping people safe. Geoff Ellis of DF Concerts said:

"The Government are doing all that they can to avoid another lockdown. As an industry we all have to support that, and we all have to do our bit."

The Federation of Small Businesses said that it does not want the prospect of stricter restrictions:

"We believe the business community will accept this change."

The Scottish Football Supporters Association said:

"If Covid certificates are what it takes to allow fans to keep supporting their clubs then it's better than no fans present."

There is a degree of understanding and pragmatism among people on the front line. Perhaps Douglas Ross could take a leaf out of their book and engage with this with a degree of responsibility and recognition of the severity of the situation that we face.

Douglas Ross: It is absolutely not responsible of Nicola Sturgeon to fail to answer questions at First Minister's question time. I was asking about engagement and about her Government. Parliament will debate the plans, but it would be nice to know exactly what we are debating. At the moment, hospitality groups, football clubs and venues have no idea what infrastructure will be in place or whether they will get any help to introduce vaccine passports. It is just another example of the shambolic, last-minute, knee-jerk decision making of this Government. The same Government that brought us confusion over what is a cafe now brings us confusion over what is a night club. John Swinney U-turned on vertical drinking; now he has U-turned on Covid passports. A month ago, he was against them; just this morning, at the COVID-19 Recovery Committee, the Deputy First Minister suggested that vaccine passports could be permanent. This Government has had months to prepare to get this right. If any of it has been properly thought through, will Nicola Sturgeon tell us exactly what infrastructure will be in place, who will administer it, what financial support will be available and whether the Deputy First Minister is correct in saying that the passports might be permanent?

The First Minister: First, in the face of a global pandemic of an infectious virus, the public should be—and I suspect are—very wary of politicians

who suggest that any Government should take a dogmatic, unchanging position, because that is not the way that we keep the public safe.

We have been considering the issue carefully. I could probably paper the walls of this chamber with quotes from me expressly saying that we had not ruled out vaccine certification, that we wanted to consider the issue carefully, that we were keeping our minds open and that we had ruled out ever asking for vaccine passports for essential public services but that, for settings such as night clubs, there was a debate to be had and a case to be made.

Regular viewers of First Minister's question time—I am not sure how big a group that is—will have heard Douglas Ross say to me that this Government needs to respect Parliament. Cabinet discussed the issue on Tuesday and I came to Parliament yesterday to tell it that it was the Government's intention that we would take our proposals to Parliament next week. We are engaging with sectors across the economy. We will put the detail to Parliament to allow Parliament to decide, and then, assuming that Parliament agrees, we will implement our proposals. That is not just the way that Government should operate; it is often—until it does not suit him—the way that Douglas Ross demands that Government operates.

This is a really serious situation, not just for Scotland but for the United Kingdom and for many countries across Europe—and vaccine certification is already operating in many of those countries. Is it too much to expect, in these serious times, that we have a leader of the Opposition who can engage properly with the substance of these matters?

Douglas Ross: Is it too much to expect to have a First Minister answer First Minister's questions? Unless the First Minister has failed to notice it, Parliament is sitting at the moment, elected members of the Scottish Parliament are asking her questions and she is unable to answer. She may be able to paper the walls with her views on Covid passports, but she has singularly failed to answer a single question about what they will mean for businesses and industries across Scotland.

This Government used to grandstand about its handling of the pandemic. We do not hear those boasts any more. From the display from the First Minister today, it looks as though vaccine passports will add to a long list of failures by this Government. We heard today that thousands of long Covid sufferers in Scotland cannot get referred to a support service, yet the Scottish National Party's flimsy pamphlet on national health service recovery did not contain a single mention of long Covid. Accident and emergency waiting times are the worst in six years, drug deaths are

the worst in seven years and alcohol deaths are the worst in eight years. People cannot get to see their general practitioner and are waiting hours for an ambulance. The First Minister is losing her grip on Covid and the NHS is in crisis. The pressure is only going to build as we move towards winter, so when will the First Minister give us a real plan to get our health service back on track?

The First Minister: We have a recovery plan. The NHS, supported by Government, starts planning for winter much earlier in the year. Those plans are there. There is enormous pressure on our national health service right now. That is partly because of rising Covid cases, which, because of the delta variant, many countries are grappling with right now.

I would say in passing that, had it been down to Douglas Ross, we would not even have in place some of the mitigations against Covid that we do have in place, because he wanted us to remove all of them and have no protections against the transmission of Covid.

As a responsible Government, we will do what requires to be done to protect the public against Covid, and we will do that for as long as is necessary. We will support our NHS with £1 billion of additional targeted resource to aid recovery. When I saw one of the Tory spokespersons commenting on the matter last week—on the day that the recovery plan was published, I think—she seemed to be saying that it was bad that we committed £1 billion, because the Tories had wanted us to commit £600 million. I was not entirely sure that I followed that logic.

On long Covid, we have invested £2.5 million in research projects and money in support services through Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland, which is making a number of legitimate points today about the further work that we need to do to ensure support for those who suffer from long Covid. We will continue to do what needs to be done and to take the decisions to support the NHS and the country to get through the Covid crisis, which is the responsible action that people expect from their Government.

I welcome all contributions from across the chamber to that discussion. Perhaps Douglas Ross can raise his game a little bit from screaming about U-turns and so on and actually be part of finding the solutions that the country needs now.

National Health Service Waiting Lists

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I know that everyone in the chamber agrees that, in the past 18 months, our national health service staff have performed remarkably under pressure. Even before the pandemic, they were undervalued, underresourced and overworked. This week, we

have seen the number of people on NHS waiting lists rise to more than 600,000. Does the First Minister agree that

“This is a humiliation for”

the SNP

“and a tragedy for the tens of thousands of patients languishing on ever lengthening lists”?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): It is the responsibility of the Government to support the NHS and to help NHS staff get through what is an extremely challenging situation for countries across the world. Most people recognise that we are in a global pandemic that has had a significant impact on our NHS. Anas Sarwar is right to say that there were challenges in our NHS before Covid, but as we can see from the waiting times improvement plan that was in place then, waiting times were starting to be reduced through the investment that we had made.

We obviously all know the impact that Covid has had on the NHS. This year’s recovery plan is backed by £1 billion of additional investment, and looks to build capacity in our NHS in relation to in-patients and day cases—a 10 per cent increase in capacity over five years, with a 20 per cent increase for in-patients and a 10 per cent increase for out-patients over the five-year period. The plan also sets out reforms to the way in which healthcare is delivered. Just last week, I visited the Golden Jubilee national hospital to look at some innovations in robotic procedures and at changes to how diagnostic operations are done.

I will not stand here and in any way underplay the challenge. However, we support the NHS through record increased funding, support for staff and the biggest agenda for change pay rise in the history of devolution—the largest pay rise across the United Kingdom—to ensure that we are delivering for patients as we come out of, and recover from, Covid.

Again, I say that that is what people look to their Government to do.

Anas Sarwar: I note that the First Minister did not answer the question. The reason why she did not is that I was actually quoting her from 2003. All I did was replace the word “Labour” with “SNP”. However, the difference is that in 2003 Nicola Sturgeon said that a list of over 84,000 people was a humiliation. We are talking today about a list of more than 600,000, compared to 84,000 then.

I know that Nicola Sturgeon says that the situation is because of the pandemic, but let us look at the stats before the pandemic: 450,000 people were languishing on NHS waiting lists before the pandemic even began—every one of them an anxious human being with a worried family. That is a humiliation.

The long lists mean that more complicated cases present at accident and emergency. This month had the worst A and E waiting times since records began: 24,000 of our fellow citizens waited more than four hours, 4,000 waited more than eight hours and almost 1,000 fellow citizens waited more than 12 hours, while ambulances queued outside hospitals. If the First Minister was looking those 24,000 patients and the 6,000 patients on waiting lists in the eye, what would she say to them?

The First Minister: I would say that it is my responsibility to support the national health service to recover from a global pandemic. The difference between now and 2003 is not the difference that Anas Sarwar tried to suggest, but is a global pandemic that has placed significant pressure on our national health service. Before the pandemic, the difference was the changing demographic of our country. Every nation across the UK is grappling with that.

That is why the Scottish Government has ensured record investment in the national health service—which would not have happened had Labour stayed in government—record staff numbers in our NHS and a recovery plan that targets £1 billion at building the capacity of our NHS.

I would say to patients that in opposition—I know, because I have been there—it is easy to come up with slogans, but in Government the responsibility is to deliver investment to support staff and to make changes for patients. That is exactly what we will continue to do.

Anas Sarwar: The problem the First Minister has is that she accepts that she relied on slogans in opposition and has kept on relying on slogans while she has been in government. That is the problem for people across the country. The First Minister cannot ignore the fact that the figure was 450,000 before the pandemic—and she thought that 84,000 was a humiliation in 2003.

Doctors, nurses and patients agree that the NHS is in crisis. We need more than the thin recovery plan that has been produced by the Government, which is more of a slogan and a public relations exercise than a genuine effort to rebuild our NHS.

Let us look at what the experts say. The BMA called the recovery plan “unrealistic”. The nurses have called the workforce planning “woefully poor”. The recovery plan means that we will not meet the 62-day cancer standard for another five years—that is on top of its not having been met for the past nine years. That will mean that people are diagnosed late, that their treatment will start late and that lives will be lost, as a result.

Will the First Minister listen to what the professionals on the front line and patients are telling her? Will she recognise that the Government plan is not good enough and is not working? With the peak pressures of winter on their way, will she act before it is too late?

The First Minister: We continue to support the plan with £1 billion of investment and 1,500 additional staff for the national treatment centres. We will continue to support the NHS in that way. If Anas Sarwar wants to come forward in the forthcoming budget process and point to where he thinks we should take extra money from to add to that, I would be very happy to listen. However, he has to do that with responsibility and not in a way that suggests that he can simply conjure money out of nowhere.

We have a big responsibility to get waiting times back on track. Incidentally, one of the other differences between now and 2003 is that our waiting times targets are so much more ambitious than they were under Labour because we are delivering more for patients and—*[Interruption.]*

The last point—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): We will hear the First Minister.

The First Minister: No one in the Government underplays the seriousness of the situation that we face right now or how difficult the challenges ahead are for all of society—the NHS in particular. However, it is only a matter of months since the Scottish people had the opportunity to look at all that and to make a choice about whom they trust and have confidence in to lead the country through those challenges. The public chose this Government.

We take that responsibility seriously every day, as we continue to navigate the country through the crisis and into recovery. We dedicate ourselves to that responsibility today and every day that we are in office.

The Presiding Officer: I now call constituency supplementaries.

Covid Vaccine Trials (Proof of Vaccination QR Codes)

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I, along with 400 others in the north-east of Scotland, am taking part in the Novavax Covid vaccine trial. The NHS Inform website has no record of all those volunteers being vaccinated, therefore we cannot download proof of vaccination or a QR code. Will the First Minister join me in thanking those volunteers and ensure that they are not excluded from any events that might require proof of vaccination using a system that is based on QR codes?

The First Minister: I thank Douglas Lumsden for raising that issue. I take the opportunity to thank everybody who has participated in vaccine trials, because they have contributed hugely to the safety and wellbeing of us all. We have already made it clear that nobody who took part in those trials, including the member, will be disadvantaged in any way. The vaccination will be recognised, and we are working on ensuring that that can be evidenced. I will write to the member to update him on exactly how that will happen.

Covid-19 (Schools)

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): The First Minister will be aware of the situation at St Ninian's high school in Kirkintilloch, where earlier this week, due to a Covid outbreak, 405 of the 850 pupils were absent from school. What support should schools such as St Ninian's expect from public health teams when such outbreaks occur? Why was the deadline for school ventilation improvement set for the October mid-term break rather than for the start of the school term in mid-August?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): On the latter question, that deadline was in order to allow schools and local authorities the opportunity, as schools went back, to assess ventilation across the school estate, to ensure that they were using CO₂ monitors to do that, and to put in place any remedial plans that were required. That on-going work is being closely monitored. It is incumbent on local public health teams to provide appropriate support to schools or any other settings that experience outbreaks.

We changed the rules—as was set out to Parliament—around contact tracing and isolation in schools in order to try to reduce the number of young people who were being asked to isolate and were therefore having their education disrupted when they were not, in reality, at risk of getting Covid. A risk-based approach is now being taken, led by test and protect and public health teams. There are public health teams in every area of Scotland to offer advice and support to schools and to others who need it.

Inverclyde Royal Hospital

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): The First Minister will be aware that temporary changes to the intensive care unit and accident and emergency trauma care at Inverclyde royal hospital in Greenock will now be made permanent, despite fierce opposition. That is a decision that will mean hundreds of patients being moved to Glasgow. That flies in the face of a commitment that was made by Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board, and by ministers in this very

chamber, that no such decision would be taken without full consultation.

Will the First Minister offer a firm commitment to the users of Inverclyde royal hospital, including users of its accident and emergency and intensive care departments, that those departments, in their full capacity, are there to stay in order to meet the full needs of all patients in West Scotland?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will happily write to Jamie Greene with more detail on that. My understanding is that those changes are certainly not permanent, and that they would not be made permanent without full and proper consultation, but I am happy to write, or to ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to do so, to the member with more information on that.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S6F-00196)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Tuesday.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am grateful for that answer. I will state this clearly where other members have not: I and my party are fundamentally opposed to vaccine passports as a matter of principle. The rush to introduce the policy in short order throws up practical problems. How will it keep up with vaccinations across borders and with the booster programme, which is already in chaos? In addition, hospitality sees the policy as a threat and has no idea how it will police it. It is unclear what it will mean for young people. Will I need a vaccine passport to join a mass protest against vaccine passports?

Above all, Scots will, for the first time, have to provide private medical data to strangers in order to access freedoms in our society. Vaccines are the way out of the pandemic, but vaccine passports are not. There is no time limit, and there is an open door to expansion. Where does this stop?

The First Minister: I do not agree with Alex Cole-Hamilton on many of those points, but I have a lot more respect for his position than I do for some of what we heard earlier, because it is a principled position and a legitimate debate.

As I have said before, I have my own concerns about the use of vaccine certification, but my view is based on the following. We are still in the grip of a pandemic. The virus is highly infectious and doing nothing over the next period is therefore not an option. We have to stem transmission and the question therefore becomes how we do that in the least restrictive and most proportionate way.

We can take nightclubs as an example. As we get into winter, it may be—although I would hope that this would not be the case—that the choice with regard to nightclubs is not between vaccine certification or no restrictions at all, but between something like vaccine certification or having to have heavier restrictions and perhaps facing closure again, which none of us wants.

This is a proportionate step, and I hope that it will be a time-limited step. It will be very limited in terms of its application to settings. As I said yesterday, certainly at this stage, we do not intend to extend it to hospitality more generally, and we would not do that without full parliamentary consultation.

Vaccine certification schemes are operating in many countries—in Ireland, for example, which is the closest to us—on a much wider-ranging basis than I set out yesterday. I genuinely wish that we were not in this position, but we are; therefore, we have to think about every proportionate measure that we can take to protect people.

We will set out the detail. Some legitimate questions have been posed, and we have to work with other countries to make sure that we have interoperability. None of these things is straightforward in our current circumstances. My judgment is that it is a proportionate step, but of course it will be the Parliament that gets to decide next week.

Free Prescriptions

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): A consultation closes today on the proposal in England and Wales to increase the qualifying age for free prescriptions from 60 to the state pension age of 66. Age UK has branded the move as a “kick in the teeth” for older people. The proposal highlights the difference between the progressive Scottish National Party Government in Scotland and the cruel politics of Westminster. Will the First Minister confirm that no one in Scotland will be left struggling or unable to afford medicines that they need to stay as healthy as possible, and that prescriptions will remain free for all?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, it is certainly the position of this Government that free prescriptions will remain. People should have access to the medicines that they need without charge and without having—as some people used to have to do—to make invidious choices between taking their medicines and feeding themselves. I never want to return to that. It beggars belief that elsewhere in the UK there is a consultation on taking away free prescriptions for people over 60. That is not my decision, obviously, but I hope that we do not see that direction of travel. I am categorical that, as long as this Government is in office, free prescriptions are here to stay.

Long Covid

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Health professionals and Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland have today published a long Covid action plan. At least 74,000 people are living with long Covid and the numbers are rising. Many of those people are not getting the services that they need. Does the First Minister agree with the recommendations in the report, in particular on the creation of a long Covid fund for health boards to access?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland is doing a fantastic job, supported by funding from the Scottish Government. It has made a number of important points today and published an action plan that has four key recommendations. Broadly, I have sympathy with them all, but we want to discuss them in detail with Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland, which is what we will do. Recommendation 4 is on a long Covid capacity fund, to which, in the course of our budget discussions, we will give serious consideration, as we will do for the other three main recommendations.

Exam System

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Our exam system, just like our education system, must be there to serve all pupils. That has not been the case in the past two years, which is shameful. Having considered the latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report, does the First Minister agree that it would be unacceptable to create a situation in which some young people could leave school with no opportunity to gain an externally assessed exam-based qualification? Does she recognise that exams are not a Victorian British legacy but a Scottish educational tradition?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I recognise the important role of exams in the Scottish educational tradition, and not only in the Scottish educational tradition. There is a need to properly consider for the future how we certificate the achievements of young people and what the correct balance is between formal exams and on-going assessment. We should all enter into that debate, and we should come at it from the perspective of what is best for our young people. I look forward to hearing views and contributions on that from across the range of perspectives. We will continue to take responsible decisions as we get our education system back on track and through the Covid recovery.

Retail Stock and Staff (Shortages)

4. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what discussions the Scottish Government has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding reports of retail

stock and staff shortages in the run-up to Christmas. (S6F-00200)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish ministers first wrote to the UK Government about this emerging problem back in July. The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands has written again this week seeking a meeting to discuss the challenges. The fact that we have had to ask for such a meeting tells its own story about how urgently, or otherwise, the UK Government is treating the issue.

We have warned repeatedly of the damage that would be caused by Brexit. We knew that the loss of freedom of movement would be particularly damaging. Sadly, staff shortages are now putting real pressure on food and drink supplies, and the images of healthy food rotting in the fields are astonishing. Frankly, the Tories should be hanging their heads in shame for this whole sorry situation.

Stuart McMillan: The British Retail Consortium is the latest organisation to warn of further price increases and disruption in the coming months, due to the Tory-led Brexit. Does the First Minister agree that Brexit has been nothing short of a disaster, that Scotland is increasingly vulnerable under Westminster control and that the only way to keep Scotland safe from the long-term economic and social devastation of the Tory-led Brexit is for Scotland to secure our independence?

The First Minister: The Conservatives do not like to hear this but, right now, not just in Scotland but across the UK, we are in the quite incredible situation—unlike other countries across the European Union, and this is not about Covid—of seeing shortages in our supermarkets and having shortages of other supplies, with children being told that there might not be toys at Christmas because of the disruption to supply chains.

Conservatives should take some responsibility, because the situation is entirely inflicted by their obsession with Brexit. There are two things that it is important to remember here. First, Scotland did not vote for Brexit. Secondly, it was utterly reckless of the Conservatives to plough ahead with Brexit in the middle of a global pandemic.

Those issues illustrate the fact: those are things that are being done to Scotland, not by Scotland. The only solution is for us to take control of all our affairs in Scotland—and, yes, that does mean being an independent country.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Has the First Minister ever told a senior Scottish police officer that she has lost confidence in them, and would it be appropriate for a First Minister to do so?

The Presiding Officer: That question is not relevant to the question. Supplementary questions

should refer to the question that was asked. I therefore move to question 5, from Tess White.

Ambulances (Increase in Waiting Times)

5. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):

To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking in response to the increase in ambulance waiting times in parts of Scotland. (S6F-00195)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Ambulance Service is currently carrying out a national review of demand and capacity. The review will ensure that the right resources are in place across the country to help meet both present and future predicted demand. Over the past four years, we have invested more than £1 billion, and we continue to invest, with just over £20 million in additional funding being made available to support the review. That has resulted in 67 extra front-line staff in the north of Scotland, with a mixture of experienced paramedics, newly qualified paramedics and technicians, along with nine patient transport service staff. The Scotland-wide figure is 296.

Work is also under way in partnership with health boards across the country to put in place improvement measures to reduce any unnecessary delays for ambulances waiting at hospitals to hand over patients.

Tess White: The First Minister whizzed through that very quickly—I had to take note very quickly to make sure that I did not miss it.

In recent weeks, NHS Grampian has said that staff are under more pressure than at any other time throughout the pandemic. There have been reports of people across the north-east waiting for up to 20—two-zero—hours to be taken to hospital by ambulance. Ambulances are being stacked outside hospital entrances, because there simply is not the capacity to treat more patients.

A 28-page plan is just not good enough. What immediate action is the Scottish Government taking to address the crisis?

The First Minister: I answered that in my first answer, but since the member said that she did not quite catch it, I will go through some of the detail again. She is right: there are challenges on our Ambulance Service because of the pressures on our national health service caused by Covid. We have not just produced a 28-page plan, important though that is; we have invested an additional £20 million—additional to the £1 billion over the past four years, which I spoke about—to support the on-going review of the Scottish Ambulance Service.

As I said, in the north of Scotland that has already resulted in 67 extra front-line staff: a

mixture of experienced and newly qualified paramedics and technicians, and nine patient transport service staff. As I said, that is more than 250 across Scotland. That is what we are doing immediately.

On the performance of the Ambulance Service, again, the service is under pressure and I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to paramedics, technicians and everybody working in the service. However, in the most recent week the Ambulance Service advises that it responded to around 10,500—10,401—emergency incidents, which was up 1.2 per cent from the previous week; for the most urgent calls, the median national response time was 8 minutes 55 seconds. I recognise that there will be people waiting longer than that and there will be some people who have waited completely unacceptable lengths of time—that is why we are investing in this way. However, we are taking the action, making the investment and supporting the Ambulance Service in the excellent work what it does.

The Presiding Officer: I call Pam Duncan-Glancy.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I think that I may have pressed my button too early, Presiding Officer. I hoped to come in after a different question.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. In that case, we move on to question 6, from Neil Gray.

Universal Credit (Reduction)

6. Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what engagement the Scottish Government has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the reduction to universal credit that is set to take place at the end of September. (S6F-00202)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): As I have set out in Parliament on previous occasions, we have strongly urged UK ministers not to push people into poverty through the cut of £20 to universal credit. Most recently, the social justice secretary joined colleagues in Wales and Northern Ireland in writing to the UK Government on the matter. I know that the same calls have come from the children's commissioners, poverty campaigners and even those on the Prime Minister's own back benches, although I am not sure that we have heard it from Conservative members in this Parliament, but I may be wrong on that.

We know that families are struggling. This cut risks pushing a further 60,000 people in Scotland, including 20,000 children, into poverty. Just to put that in context, the cut would be the biggest overnight reduction to a basic rate of social security since the beginning of the modern welfare

state more than 70 years ago. I hope that we can unite in this Parliament to call on the UK Government not to take that £20 away from the people who need it most.

Neil Gray: It is shocking, isn't it? The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Thérèse Coffey, responded to the four nations committee chairs' joint letter calling for the uplift to be kept by saying that the Government is prioritising getting people into work, ignoring the 1.7 million people on universal credit who the Department for Work and Pensions does not expect to get or find work and the almost two fifths of universal credit recipients who are already in work but still need to use services such as the Paul's Parcels (Food Poverty Prevention Group) food bank in Shotts, which I visited last week. Does that not show the limitation of our hybrid, only part-devolved social security system, where the benefit of the likes of the Scottish child payment will be wiped out and tens of thousands of people in Scotland will be forced into poverty at a stroke of the chancellor's pen?

The First Minister: There is a serious issue here. The intended removal, which I hope does not go ahead, of the £20 a week will push thousands and thousands of people into poverty, and that is not something that any of us should sit back and be in any way comfortable about. Neil Gray is absolutely right. The Tories say that they would rather that people were in work. Of course we want to support people into work where they can work, but so many of the people on universal credit are already working—that is the point that is being missed here—and many others are not able to work, but they will all have that £20 a week taken away. As I said a moment ago, in Scotland alone that means 20,000 children pushed into poverty.

That is why the other serious aspect of this is the one that Neil Gray raises. We have rolled out already, and are rolling out, the Scottish child payment and there are, rightly, calls for us to go further with that and to increase the value of the child payment, which we are committed to doing. However, that £20 cut simply takes away money that we are trying to put into the pockets of the poorest in our society. It is ridiculous to take such decisions. People surely do not even have to support independence to say that it would be much better if we could join up all of this within the powers of this Parliament so that we can decide and set aside the resources that we need to lift children out of poverty and not see them pushed back into poverty.

This is an issue, but not the only one, where I hope we can find real consensus across the chamber and can act to tackle child poverty, rather than do what we can while watching a Government elsewhere do the complete opposite.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the Presiding Officer and members in the chamber for their patience with my error earlier in pressing the button too soon.

I hope that every MP will do everything that they can to retain the £20 uplift in universal credit, because to remove it is abhorrent and would mean that some families in Scotland will no longer be eligible for the Scottish child payment. Will the Scottish Government use its powers here to ensure that those families who would have been eligible for the child payment continue to get it?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We will do everything that we can, through our powers and resources, to make sure that we lift children out of poverty and do not allow them to be pushed into poverty. I absolutely respect and sympathise with the sentiment behind that question, but there is a hard issue for us in this Parliament. Every time the Conservatives at Westminster make a cut to social security and save money from that cut, they do not transfer that money to the Scottish Parliament so, every time we have to mitigate such a cut, we have to take money from elsewhere in the budget. It is an unsustainable way to proceed so, although we all want to lift children out of poverty, it goes back to my previous point. I am not that hopeful that I will get Conservative agreement to that point, but I am more hopeful that I will get the agreement of people such as Pam Duncan-Glancy, because I recognise her sincerity. We need to bring all those powers to the Scottish Parliament, so that we can do those things sensibly and we can—*[Interruption.]*

Conservatives who cannot bring themselves to oppose their own chancellor taking £20 a week away from the poorest children in our society have no room to lecture me about using powers in this Parliament. Let those of us who genuinely care about lifting children out of poverty come together in opposition to that callous, uncaring Tory Government.

Anti-Irish Racism and Anti-Catholic Prejudice (Public Displays)

7. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what plans the Scottish Government has to tackle public displays of anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic prejudice. (S6F-00189)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I say very clearly that there is never any excuse or justification for hatred or bigotry and I unequivocally condemn anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic prejudice. It should be called what it is and it should be called out.

Scotland is a diverse, multicultural society. That diversity strengthens us as a nation and that is why it is so important that we tackle all forms of prejudice and discrimination. Police Scotland is committed to protecting our communities and will act on all incidents of bigoted violence, disorder and vandalism, including follow-up investigations based on evidence that has been gathered. Those who commit criminal acts that are motivated by prejudice can expect to feel the full force of justice, and I know that, just this morning, the police have issued a comment about the progress of a particular investigation.

Pauline McNeill: I thank the First Minister for that strong answer. I hope that she agrees that there is still a clear problem with a minority of people displaying anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudice, as well as a growing feeling that, if those terms were used about any other minority group, the sentiments displayed on our streets would be treated far more seriously. For the avoidance of doubt, I am sure that the First Minister is aware that the famine song contains the words

“The famine is over, why don’t you go home?”,

as confirmed by Lord Carloway in his judgment in 2009.

I welcome the fact that there were three arrests last night in relation to that particular incident and I applaud the fact that Rangers Football Club has just announced an indefinite ban of the members who they identified as being involved in singing the famine song; that must be welcomed. I want the First Minister to reassure me that Police Scotland will respond proportionately to those offences and, in doing so, I offer my full support to the First Minister to work with her and everyone to ensure that all forms of racism and bigotry are stamped out in Scotland.

The First Minister: I thank Pauline McNeill for the question, the way in which she asked it and the offer of support, because we should all come together to tackle this issue.

I say clearly—and I know that everyone across the chamber will support this—that I take the view that, for anybody who chooses to live in Scotland, whether they and their families have been here for generations or whether they have come to Scotland very recently, it is home. This is their home and we should not allow anybody ever to say—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if members at all times in the chamber remember that we are privileged to represent the people of Scotland and that at all times in the chamber we treat one another with great dignity and respect. I would be grateful if we could now hear the First Minister. Thank you.

The First Minister: Presiding Officer, I have just had a comment made to me from a sedentary position. I would not normally do this, but I am so deeply offended by the comment that I want to take it up with you after this meeting, so that, with your permission, the member might be asked to reflect on that and to withdraw the comment. It was a comment that would have been unacceptable in any context, but in the context of what we are discussing right now, I am deeply aggrieved that any member thought that that was an appropriate thing to say.

I go back to the very important question that was asked. All of us—all of us—have a duty to stand against racism, prejudice and bigotry. I dedicate myself, not just as First Minister but as a citizen of this country, to always do so. I look forward to working with anybody who stands with me and with people across Scotland in that. I thank Pauline McNeill again for her question.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister’s questions. I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so quietly.

McVitie's Factory Glasgow (Proposed Closure)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-00275, in the name of Paul Sweeney, on our factory, our future: the fight to save McVitie's at Tollcross, Glasgow. The debate will be concluded without any questions being put. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now. I call Paul Sweeney to open the debate.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament condemns the proposals from Pladis to close the McVitie's Victoria Biscuit Works in Tollcross, in the east end of Glasgow; understands that the proposed closure would put some 500 jobs in the area at risk of redundancy; recognises what it sees as the critical impact that closing the factory would have on workers as well as the community in the east end, which it has served since 1925; recognises the cultural significance of McVitie's which is an iconic Scottish brand dating back to 1830; notes the view that there are viable options to avert complete closure, including the re-fitting or re-location of the site, and that these could be given careful consideration in order to maintain and grow production and associated jobs in Scotland; commends the efforts of McVitie's workers and their trade unions, GMB Scotland and Unite, which have organised to oppose the closure proposals, including the creation of a petition, which, it understands has garnered the support of 50,000 people from the area, and notes the call for decisive action to be taken prevent absolute closure in line with the demands of the Save The Jobs campaign.

12:48

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer, and thanks to all colleagues across the chamber who supported the motion for debate today. I declare an interest as a member of Unite and GMB Scotland, both of which are fighting relentlessly to protect as many jobs as they can.

The struggle that is faced by the workers at McVitie's in the east end of Glasgow echoes the struggle of so many skilled industrial workers in Scotland over the past 50 years. From Michelin Tyres in Dundee to the Caley railway works in Glasgow, it is a grimly familiar story of an overseas owner asset stripping Scotland's industrial base. However, as in so many other cases, closure is far from inevitable, and this Parliament, founded in the face of such struggles, has a duty to prevent it going the same way as so many other proud Scottish industries and brands.

The workforce is highly dedicated, talented and loyal. They are a workforce rooted in their local community who are incredibly proud of the work and the history, which extends back through generations of families to the foundation of

MacFarlane Lang's bakery in the Gallowgate two centuries ago, building a brand that is famous the world over. They are a credit to their community, and they should be extremely proud of their conduct throughout this period of distressing uncertainty.

We saw what the plant and its employment meant to the local community in the immediate aftermath of Pladis's closure announcement in May. They sprang into action and, to date, their petition to save nearly 500 jobs has amassed more than 75,000 signatures.

To be fair, the Scottish Government is to be commended for at least setting up the action group that has developed the counter proposal with Scottish Enterprise and the Interpath consultancy as an alternative to the end of McVitie's production in Scotland. It engaged with the relevant trade unions and agencies and put together a viable and credible alternative.

The blame for the closure lies squarely with Turkish-owned multinational Pladis, which took control of McVitie's and the wider United Biscuits group in 2014. However, the Scottish Government is far from having exhausted all options at its disposal.

Pladis and its parent company, Yildiz Holdings, are classic examples of the unacceptable face of capitalism, loading their acquired companies with debt while extracting profits and running their assets down in a programme of managed decline.

I have long argued that Scotland, and Britain as a whole, must have an industrial strategy that protects home-grown brands from takeovers by asset-stripping overseas predators, and the situation at McVitie's in Glasgow is just the latest example that proves exactly why that must now be a priority.

As far as I am concerned, Pladis's conduct amounts to industrial vandalism, which will inflict misery on a working-class community that simply cannot afford it. The east end of Glasgow already has an unemployment rate that is almost double the national average. The latest available figures show that more than 5,000 people in the area claim unemployment benefits. We now face the prospect of another 500 being added to that figure, and it is not just 500 workers in isolation but 500 families who now face uncertainty. It is absolutely shameful.

While the executives at Pladis were planning to wield the axe at the Tollcross plant, forcing hundreds on to the dole, they enjoyed a record turnover of £2 billion with profits amounting to £154 million. Is anyone really going to argue that any of that would have been possible without the dedicated and skilled workforce that they are now abandoning?

The counter proposal robustly addresses the company's justification for closing Tollcross—a high cost per tonne and low volume relative to production capacity across the United Kingdom. The proposal centres around a purpose-built, state-of-the-art 250,000 square foot factory on Government-owned land at nearby Gartcosh, giving Pladis a blueprint to develop a new, highly efficient factory system in the future to replace what is admittedly an aged portfolio of seven production sites acquired by United Biscuits over the years.

The problem is who is going to pay for it. That is where my praise for the Scottish Government is not quite so forthcoming. Last month, the company rejected the counter proposal, meaning that we are now essentially in a stand-off situation. The company wants to know who will pay for the proposal, while the Scottish Government wants to know that Pladis is committed to maintaining a presence in Scotland before it will commit to detailed financing arrangements. For as long as that boardroom stand-off continues, 500 families are left in the lurch.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the company is not going to budge, which is why I implore the Scottish Government to put its cards on the table and take a lead. Do I think that the counter proposal is credible? Yes, I do. Do I think that the Scottish Government genuinely wants to save these jobs? Yes, I do. Do I think that it has exhausted all the options available? No, I do not.

Last night, the Scottish Government claimed that Pladis had given no indication that financial assistance and state aid would change its approach. In response, I ask the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy a simple question: has the Scottish Government, in negotiations, explicitly said to Pladis that it would provide the capital funding to build the new factory? If not, why not?

Pladis operates sale-and-lease-back arrangements for a number of its sites in Chiswick, High Wycombe and Carlisle. The assertion that it is not open to that financing structure is unconvincing and does not stand up to scrutiny. Frankly, we need more from the Scottish Government. Today, therefore, I once more ask it to commit to funding the counter proposal. Let us save those jobs and not add McVitie's to the growing list of brands lost because of Scotland's lack of an industrial strategy.

12:55

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): It is incredibly disappointing that Pladis is refusing to change its position, which is likely to mean the loss of 468 jobs in the east end of Glasgow. In

some cases, that will mean two or more wage earners in one family losing their jobs, so the financial implications for some will be huge.

I understand that there is also criticism of the redundancy packages that have been offered. I am sure that the GMB and other unions will be pressing Pladis on that, and I am sure that we will all want to help them if we can. I certainly trust that Jobcentre Plus, Skills Development Scotland and other public agencies will support those who lose their jobs.

I broadly accept that the biscuit and snack market is very competitive and there is probably overcapacity. Younger people do not seem to be eating biscuits as much as my generation did. When I have a Rich Tea, Ginger Nut or Chocolate Digestive with my coffee, I notice that younger staff who work for me tend not to do so. Therefore, it was highly likely that Pladis would have to close some factories, and I suspect that Tollcross might not be the last. In practice, Tollcross was competing with the other Pladis plants. I know that the Government, council and unions did not want to say this, but the reality is that, if we were to save Tollcross, it would be because another factory in Manchester, Liverpool or Carlisle was to close instead.

For many years, it has been clear that the Tollcross factory was not being invested in, so most of us have been half expecting its closure for a long time.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): [*Inaudible.*—does he not acknowledge that there should be a role for the Scottish Government to pre-emptively support industry and reinvest? Perhaps investment could be made in biscuits that young people do want to eat.

John Mason: We will hear from the Government in due course. The Government, along with the council and trade unions, has put a lot of effort in. I am not aware that there is more that the Government can do, but we will hear its responses to the points that Mr Sweeney made.

Some years ago, Pladis was offered support to relocate in Glasgow. Scottish Enterprise and Clyde Gateway were involved in that, and the Government and the council have strengthened that offer in recent weeks.

The galling thing is that all of this has been happening at a time when the Scottish food and drink sector has been doing very well. Even within the biscuit sector, we see Tunnocks, Walkers and Border Biscuits doing well, while Baxters and AG Barr have been other success stories. We know that Scottish food produce is of a high quality and often commands a premium price on world markets, as is the case with salmon and whisky. One disappointment for me has been that

McVitie's has consistently refused to brand its goods from Tollcross as Scottish. I guess that that makes it easier to package all the biscuits in the same way, but the company has missed a trick there.

Another significant factor is that McVitie's was not under Scottish ownership with a Scottish headquarters. Being a Scottish company does not guarantee that there will be no problems and no closures. We know that other Scottish businesses have had to cut costs and trim staff. However, when the HQ is in Scotland, it means that there is generally a stronger commitment to continuing here and to supporting the local employees and outside contractors. It also means that the jobs here will tend to be of a higher quality than if the factory was just one among many branches. It therefore seems to me that one of the lessons we can take out of the situation is that we must resist more strongly the takeover of Scottish companies. I accept that that will not apply in every case, but it should be our assumption that it is better to keep HQs in Scotland unless there are specific reasons to do otherwise and not just make the shareholders a fast buck.

United Biscuits was listed on the stock exchange in 1948. Such a listing is sometimes seen as a sign of success, but it is also a sign that control has been lost and that the link with the business roots has largely gone.

There was an excellent article in *The Herald* in May this year by Martin Stepek of the Scottish Family Business Association. He argued that we need to look at other ways of succession for family businesses, such as selling to their employees.

I hope for the best for the employees of McVitie's at Tollcross. If the Government can do anything, that will be great and we will all support it, but I also hope that the Government and Scottish Enterprise will take on board the need to keep more business headquarters in Scotland.

13:00

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I thank Paul Sweeney for securing a debate on such an important matter.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about a proposal that will have huge adverse consequences for the east end of Glasgow. Like many local residents, I am bitterly disappointed and frustrated over the fashion in which Glasgow's McVitie's factory has been pushed towards closure at the expense of so many jobs. First and foremost, my thoughts are with the workers and their families at this difficult time.

I pay tribute to the efforts that have been made by the many public figures, organisations and

individuals across our communities who have come together to fight for the McVitie's jobs in Glasgow. In particular, I would like to thank the members of the save our jobs McVitie's Tollcross campaign, who, thanks to the sheer determination of their campaigning, attracted almost 80,000 signatures in support of saving the factory.

Despite the bitterly disappointing outcome, the efforts to leave no stone unturned in saving the jobs have been truly remarkable. However, more can still be done.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): [Inaudible.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Thomson, I am not sure that your microphone is on. Is your card in? Can you try again?

Michelle Thomson: I apologise for that.

Does Annie Wells recognise that the regulation—the control of which, as Paul Sweeney said, resides in the City of London—has allowed the company to pull money out, to have very opaque tax arrangements and so on? Will she join me in asking the Westminster Government to sort that out? The regulatory situation is a repeating theme, which has affected a number of businesses across the United Kingdom.

Annie Wells: In this debate, we are talking about 500 individuals, and I want to concentrate on them. I will happily have a conversation with the member about the issue that she raises after the debate.

I know that my colleagues in the Glasgow Conservatives, including Councillor Thomas Kerr, have campaigned tirelessly, alongside their Labour and Scottish National Party counterparts, to champion the McVitie's workers in the face of Pladis's decision.

I share the anger of so many people about the fact that Pladis appears to be determined to press ahead with the closure of the Tollcross factory, which will result in the loss of almost 500 jobs. For too long, the company has failed to fully support the site. The proposed closure is the final blow to the workforce. The impact that it will have on the workers, their families and the local community cannot be overstated.

Generations of workers in the local area and beyond have helped to bring success to a historic manufacturing institution in Glasgow. More recently, workers have gone the extra mile by continuing to manufacture, despite the difficult circumstances that the Covid pandemic has brought. For the factory to close in such a fashion is a true blow to the local community and the whole of Glasgow. It is a slap in the face to a loyal and highly dedicated workforce.

Sadly, the public health emergency that is presented by the virus is still unfolding. Given that we face one of the biggest economic challenges in our lifetime, the need to secure Glasgow's and Scotland's economic recovery has never been more urgent. Many Glaswegians have been forced into financial hardship over the past 18 months, and we are supposed to be looking ahead to a new period of promising economic recovery. The loss of the highly valued jobs at the Tollcross factory is certainly not the start of the economic recovery from Covid that Glasgow needs. In addition, the major retailer Tesco Extra Parkhead, which is also in the east end of the city, has signalled that it might have to downsize, which could lead to further disruption of jobs and livelihoods in the local area.

I fully expect the parties involved to explore every avenue to protect as many jobs as possible. What matters now is that those who face the prospect of redundancy get the right support. I urge the Scottish Government to step up and to commit to making that the case.

13:05

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests.

The McVitie's factory means a great deal to me personally. I do not mean the building: I mean the people, the workers. For five years I worked with the GMB and with representatives such as Phyllis Riddell, Margaret Boyd and Tommy McDonald. We organised those workers in battles over skills shortages, understaffing, equal pay, long hours and capital underinvestment.

We won many battles. Some we lost, but those workers are now facing Armageddon, so I say to members here today that it is our duty and the duty of this Parliament not to walk away and accept defeat but to stand firm and fight with the workers.

There is simple injustice at the heart of what is happening here: the injustice that a company or a factory can be bought and sold—and now faces closure—with little or no say for the workers and a transnational corporation unwilling to co-operate; and the injustice that quality brands, some more than 100 years old, that were built up over decades by generations of workers can be taken over, asset stripped and robbed in just 2,000 days. That is nothing less than banditry.

People tell me that the idea of class is out of date and that class does not matter any more. Look at the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the owners of Pladis. Look at how little wealth or power is in the hands of the workers of Pladis in Glasgow and tell me that there is no

class system at work. If ever there was an example of why we so desperately need a different future, beyond this sort of corporate, extractive, asset robbing bandit capitalism run by an ever narrowing elite, this is it.

What is happening at McVitie's should ring alarm bells for this Parliament and Government. Our economy is precariously exposed to external ownership, which the present Government appears to be, at best, agnostic about and, at worst, positively enthusiastic about. There are alarm bells about what happens when you separate corporate management and control from so-called "mere operations", even though it is those mere operations that maintain the quality of the brand that makes the money that lines the pockets of shareholders. Alarm bells should also ring to say that, at last, we urgently need a Scottish industrial strategy that is investment-led, puts jobs first and that is people-centred, driven by manufacturing and based on democratic economic planning.

The day must surely come when working women and men like those at McVitie's Tollcross finally have the power to shape their own destiny and when we have an economy that works in the interests of the many, not the few, where the rights of owners are not absolute and where jobs and livelihoods cannot simply be bought and sold—and sold down the river.

On Tuesday, we marked the centenary of the birth of Raymond Williams who once said:

"To be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing."

That is why the Parliament must be awakened. Ministers must understand the workers' anger. They know that the deck is stacked against them. Ministers must understand that we need concerted action from the new coalition Government: not sending in the PACE team, but concerted action. There is still time to save these jobs, to save the factory and to save the workers. That is the task that lies before us. That is what we were sent here to do. I do not want only old memories of the McVitie's factory. I want today's workers and the generations to come to have the new future that they deserve.

13:09

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Paul Sweeney for bringing this important and timely debate to the chamber and for the work that he has done on the matter so far. The campaign has been incredible because of the amazing workforce at McVitie's, and it has given us hope and motivation as politicians. We must win this fight.

The GMB, of which I declare that I am a member, and Unite have left no stone unturned in

the resources that they have applied to the campaign, working with Kate Forbes, who we will hear from later.

I have worked with McVitie's on various issues over the past five years, and there were points at which we felt that changes to the production line signified a lack of commitment. We were always given an assurance, but it has to be said that we had that doubt in the back of our minds.

As Paul Sweeney said, the Glasgow factory has been the highest performing of all the United Kingdom sites and there is no reason, on the face of it, for it to be selected. It has performed against key performance indicators in areas such as efficiency and maintenance, manufacturing and running on time, despite the fact that it has been up against it, given that it clearly needs investment.

I listened to John Mason's speech. I have spent a lot of time in this Parliament and I have been a constituency MSP and a regional list MSP. I feel that there is something in him, as the constituency member, that seems to be holding back. He seems to be giving up this fight too easily. The lines at McVitie's were adjusted to reduce the amount of sugar in the biscuits in order to accommodate what is an obvious concern for many factories that make products that contain sugar, so I think that that is a bit of a diversion.

The factory worked through the pandemic as an essential service. As MSPs, we all helped the workforce to get through that difficult time when it was there serving its community. When the workforce was told of the plans to close the site, it was shocked and devastated at the news, and the ripple effects and financial implications for Glasgow's east end and the Scottish economy are deeply concerning.

I welcome the fact that Kate Forbes and Susan Aitken got together very quickly to work on an alternative plan, and we must work together on it.

I have said from the beginning, when I addressed rallies and spoke to the workforce, and also in the chamber directly to the First Minister, that I have always believed that her status as an international figure, which she is, was instrumental in getting Pladis to the table and I know that she has met the company. I am sure that the cabinet secretary, who has been dedicated to the fight, will appreciate the point that I am making: the involvement of the First Minister has added something and we need to make sure that she will fight with us on this to the death.

That the Government has more to give was one of the central points that Paul Sweeney made. There is more that the Scottish Government can do and can give to ensure that Pladis does not walk away from the site because the offer is too

good to refuse. Those are the terms that we need to offer.

I will continue to fight alongside the workforce, the unions, Government ministers, my colleagues, John Mason and anyone who believes that we cannot give up the fight on behalf of the workforce, the people of Glasgow and the west of Scotland, and the industrial landscape that does not need the closure of the McVitie's factory.

13:13

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I declare an interest as a member of the GMB union.

I congratulate Paul Sweeney MSP on bringing the debate to the chamber, and I thank my colleagues across the Parliament, as well as the GMB and Unite trade unions, for all the tireless work that they have done so far to protect the jobs at McVitie's. I express my on-going solidarity with the workers at the Tollcross site and their families. I say to them that their fight is our fight and that we will be behind them every step of the way.

Glasgow is a great city and I am incredibly proud to represent it. The fact that it suffers from some of the worst poverty in Scotland is a tragedy, but it is not inevitable. Unemployment rates are rising more in Glasgow than they are in other parts of the country and almost half of Glasgow's residents live in deprived areas. Glasgow consistently has more people claiming out-of-work benefits than anywhere else in Scotland. According to the Government's data, last year 34 per cent of children in Glasgow were living in relative poverty.

To make things worse, social security is being cut to the bone. An estimated 40 per cent of Glasgow residents expect to have their benefits slashed by the upcoming changes to universal credit, and some of the worst-affected areas, with more than half of families with children being affected by the cuts, are in three of our city's constituencies.

On top of that, the council's budget has been cut by 11 per cent since 2014, despite the Scottish Government's funding having increased by more than 3 per cent. The Government's cuts are equivalent to more than £1,500 per household. People in Glasgow can take no more. We must go hard and fast on poverty and inequality all across the UK. When it comes to doing that, I am afraid that neither the UK Government nor the Scottish Government are hitting the mark.

Against that backdrop of poverty and insecurity, the workers at the McVitie's factory in Tollcross have been told that they are losing their jobs. That is 500 more workers and families facing

uncertainty, at risk of being of being pulled into poverty, and being let down by the lack of a safety net to protect people when they lose their jobs. Throughout the pandemic, the McVitie's Tollcross workers showed up day in, day out. Tollcross is the highest-performing McVitie's site, as we have heard, with a dedicated and diligent workforce. They have given so much to the factory, and this is the thanks that they get.

The factory has stood in Tollcross for almost a century. Generations upon generations of Glaswegians have worked there, and there are cases of whole households working there together. Many workers have said that the factory is like a second family to them, with others describing the overwhelming feeling of devastation at the prospect of losing it. The factory is not just a workplace; it is central to their lives and a cornerstone of the community.

To see Pladis turn its back is appalling. It is yet another example of how the people of Glasgow are being disrespected. That assault on our jobs and communities cannot be allowed to continue. The McVitie's workforce deserves better, Glasgow deserves better and the people of Glasgow want better. As of today, the save our jobs petition has 77,456 signatures—a staggering number that speaks to the overwhelming volume of support that the people of Glasgow are showing for the workers at Tollcross. There have been displays of solidarity, including the rally in Tollcross park and the tireless efforts of the GMB and Unite to protect jobs.

Support for the McVitie's factory reaches beyond Glasgow, because we know that the McVitie's story reaches beyond our city. For example, there have been demonstrations outside Marks and Spencer stores in Edinburgh and Dundee. The people of Scotland see this injustice and they demand action.

It is not good enough to sit back and watch as 500 people lose their jobs. We have a responsibility to do everything in our power to prevent closure of the site. There is a window of opportunity; it is vital that we grasp that opportunity and do absolutely everything that we can. With the right funding and support, there is no reason why the factory needs to shut. I welcome the efforts that have already been made by the Scottish Government to try to save the Tollcross factory and protect jobs, and I echo the sentiments of my colleagues on the Labour benches.

Pladis's decision to reject the counterproposal and to continue with the plan to cease operation should not mean that we give up and turn our backs on the workers. Instead, we need now to double down on our efforts and not rest until we have exhausted every option. There are solutions

available, whether it is capital funding or investment in machinery and resources.

Should the worst-case scenario come to be, the Government must continue to support the workforce. It must support them into new jobs without allowing anyone to slip into poverty, and it must use all the powers that it has in social security in doing that.

The workers and their families deserve our support. The fight is not yet over and we have their backs. Now is the time to step up the fight for the future of McVitie's Tollcross factory. I urge everyone in the chamber, regardless of political party, to join the fight and work together to save those jobs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Kate Forbes to respond to the debate. The cabinet secretary is joining us remotely.

13:19

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes): I thank Paul Sweeney for bringing the debate, and I welcome union representatives including Pat McIlvogue to Parliament.

As we have heard from members, the importance of McVitie's Tollcross calls for robust cross-party collaboration and very strong partnership with trade unions to save the factory. I believe that over the past few months, since the announcement by Pladis, we have all risen to the challenge. I would like to thank the trade unions in particular. They work tirelessly to represent their members, even in the face of constant hurdles. I also pay tribute to local representatives, especially David Linden MP, for all that they have done to engage the UK Government in the fight.

I am disappointed not to be in the chamber today, unexpectedly, which is due to my contact with a positive Covid case in the family. Nevertheless, I hope that I can speak robustly for the workers. I know that it is not normally possible to take interventions when speaking remotely, and it is perhaps not the done thing, Presiding Officer, but I wonder whether you would allow me to pause later in my speech to take questions or interventions from members who want to intervene. If I pause, perhaps you could call anybody who stands up.

The announcement by Pladis in May that it planned to close its site in Tollcross, with the loss of almost 500 jobs, was, as other members have articulated, a devastating blow not only for the workers who are directly affected, but for the local area and, indeed, our country. The implications of the decision will have a ripple effect—not just on the workers themselves, who have been through a

hugely stressful period, but on supply chains and others whose work relies indirectly on the factory.

Paul Sweeney and others have rightly pointed out that the site has a very rich history in the east end of Glasgow, having been established almost 100 years ago. In addition to the direct effect on the people who are employed, the loss of the brand to Scotland is difficult to accept. That is why, from the very beginning, my priority has always been the workforce at the site. I have ensured that the Scottish Government and others have taken every action possible when it comes to Pladis.

We moved very quickly at the outset to respond to the news with a collaborative partnership approach. We immediately established the action group, and I have chaired that action group alongside the leader of Glasgow City Council. The action group's membership includes the Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council, a number of public sector partners including Scottish Enterprise, and GMB and Unite. Representatives of the non-unionised staff are also members of the action group, and they have made invaluable contributions and have represented their workforce admirably throughout this very challenging process.

I think that all of us would have liked to have had representation from Pladis itself on the action group. It would have given the group an opportunity to understand the company's thinking at first hand. It would also have allowed us to put to management direct questions on the company's rationale. Most important is that it would have allowed us to use all the evidence and data to build the best possible counterproposal. I have written numerous times to Pladis's managing director inviting him to attend the action group but, to date, every single one of those invitations has been declined.

Instead, we have worked closely with the unions, offering advice and support as they developed the counterproposal, which they presented to Pladis on 27 July. We enlisted the help of external commercial advisers to support and assist the unions in development of the proposal, which is, as others have said, well formed and compelling. The proposal took a lot of effort to produce, which makes it all the more disappointing that just two weeks after it was presented to the company, Pladis rejected it and announced its decision to proceed with closure.

What is doubly hard to take for workers, unions and the action group is that that disappointment is compounded by the fact that when the First Minister and Deputy First Minister met Pladis's global chief executive on 29 July, he gave very firm assurances that there would be full consideration of, and engagement on, the proposal. Both I and the First Minister have written

separately to Pladis, after its decision, to remind the company of that commitment and to ask that it honour it.

At this time of difficulty, I want members of Parliament and the workers to know this: we have worked tirelessly to save the factory and we will not give up. Richard Leonard said that we should not walk away—we have not. We have constantly, continually and unrelentingly pursued the matter. Richard Leonard said that ministers should understand the anger of the workforce. I understand that anger, because I have been speaking to the workers, and I understand that we should not send in the PACE—partnership action for continuing employment—team. We will not. We have established the action group to look at all alternatives to closure. The evidence for what I say in my speech this afternoon is in every step that we have taken over the past few months, in every meeting that we have had with Pladis—at which robust words have been exchanged—and in every action that all of us have taken.

We were prepared to engage with Pladis on how best to progress a commercial proposal, but before discussions had begun, it confirmed its intentions. Our aim was always to present the most compelling case, and we will continue to work together to try to secure the best possible outcome. We stand prepared to continue to engage with Pladis on how we can help to maintain a presence in Scotland.

Before I see whether there are any interventions, I want to touch on a point that a number of members have raised. If we are to continue to provide support—the trade unions, I think, agree with this—we need assurances and commitments from Pladis that it is committed to and will remain in Scotland, and that it will continue to provide employment for the longer term.

To pick up on Paul Sweeney's question about finance, I make it clear that the First Minister and I have been absolutely transparent and open about our willingness to provide financial support if it means that Pladis will keep the factory open. We have articulated that position in letters as well as in—albeit virtual—face-to-face conversations.

What would not be helpful to the workers or the negotiations would be our offering a blank cheque without any firm commitment that Pladis will keep the factory open. Of course, the fear is that whatever we offer will always be too low for a company that is determined to shut down the factory. My last letter to Pladis in the past few weeks—and, indeed, the First Minister's last letter in the past week or so—asked a very clear question: what value would be enough to keep Pladis in Scotland? If what we have offered so far is not enough, what will it take to keep the factory

open? The answers to those letters, one of which I received, have still not answered that question.

I know that it is not the done thing, Presiding Officer, but I am happy to take interventions at this point.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In response to that offer I say that I am sure that your willingness to engage in that way in the debate is very much appreciated, given that you are self-isolating and are therefore not in the chamber.

However, I have been advised by the senior clerk that the technical platform simply does not allow meaningful engagement in that way at this time. I am confident that members who wish to take up the cabinet secretary's offer will find the means to do so through correspondence, email, oral or written questions or some other way.

We will have to leave it there, cabinet secretary, so I ask that you bring your remarks to a conclusion.

Kate Forbes: Thank you, Presiding Officer. It is worth trying to be pioneering, at the very least.

I am very happy to continue conversations and discussions with members outwith the debate. I am not someone who likes to give up, and I am absolutely adamant that the Tollcross factory is vital—not just locally and not just to each of the workers, but nationally. We will continue to work on trying to secure a future for Pladis and its staff here in Scotland.

13:28

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Point of Order

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My comments during First Minister's questions were over the line. I would like to withdraw them and to apologise to both the chamber and the First Minister.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I am grateful that Ms White has reflected on her behaviour and that she has apologised to the chamber for those remarks.

You will be in no doubt at all, Ms White, that great offence was caused. I would like to be absolutely certain that the apology is unambiguous, that you withdraw the remarks, and that you apologise whole-heartedly. Can you please stand and confirm that that is the case?

Tess White: I confirm, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. The fact that, on this occasion, no further action will be taken does not in any way detract from the seriousness with which I view this incident. Members must be in no doubt at all that I expect that their conduct at all times will be worthy of that of a member of the Scottish Parliament.

Portfolio Question Time

14:32

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and around the Holyrood campus. I ask that members take care to observe those measures, including while entering and exiting the chamber, and to please only use the aisles and walkways to access their seat or when moving around the chamber.

The next item of business is portfolio questions on rural affairs and islands. Members who want to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the course of the relevant question, or press R in the chat function if they are joining us remotely.

Covid-19 Restrictions (Monitoring Island Economies)

1. **Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what monitoring it has undertaken of island economies following the easing of Covid-19 restrictions. (S6O-00081)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): We have been monitoring economic conditions across Scotland throughout the pandemic and will continue to do so as and when restrictions ease. Our new 10-year national strategy for economic transformation will set out the steps that we will take to deliver a green economic recovery and support new green jobs, businesses and industries for the future for all Scotland.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Recovery from the Covid restrictions across island communities has been mixed. Some islands have been able to benefit from the process of opening up, while others, such as some of those that the summer ferry crisis has affected, have not. I raised that issue with the cabinet secretary yesterday and did not get an answer. In her role in cross-Government co-ordination of islands policy, what has she done to address the on-going issues? Will she support the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport coming to the chamber to make a statement as a matter of urgency?

Mairi Gougeon: I hope that the member has raised those particular points on ferries, which he raised today and in yesterday's debate, with the Minister for Transport, Graeme Dey. We realise how critical those lifeline services are. That is why the Minister for Transport has made addressing those issues his absolute priority. I hope that the

member will raise the matter with the relevant minister.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that while we are coming out of the pandemic is the worst possible moment for many island businesses to have to cope with staff shortages caused by the Brexit deal? Does she agree with many island businesses that emergency Covid work visas for European Union citizens would at least alleviate some of the mess that Brexit has created?

Mairi Gougeon: Scotland has to be able to attract talented workers from across Europe without excessive immigration barriers. Under the new points-based system, the main visa routes are for high earners, with almost no route at all for those who come below the threshold, who are so desperately needed across many sectors. That, along with the United Kingdom Government's decision to delay the implementation of the majority of regulated qualifications framework levels 3 to 5 roles eligible for the shortage occupation list, risks continued labour shortages, particularly in areas such as our islands.

The scale of the situation that is faced by island businesses is a direct consequence of the UK Government's approach to Brexit and its refusal to listen to the repeated warnings of the Scottish Government and sector stakeholders.

Last week and this week, we have heard calls from across the food and drink industry as well as NFU Scotland for urgent action to address those problems. I have also followed up on that in my correspondence with the UK Government. The crisis situation is of the UK Government's making, through the reckless Brexit that it pursued, and the UK Government now needs to fix it.

Sustainable Farming

2. **Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it will take to support more sustainable farming. (S6O-00082)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The economic and environmental sustainability of Scottish agriculture is paramount. I recently announced the appointment of an agriculture reform implementation oversight board and a consultation, building on the recommendations from the farmer-led groups. In order to deliver early action on implementing measures, the board will develop a preliminary package of funded measures for agreement by the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26. That will be based on the work of

the farmer-led groups and will have an early focus on livestock emissions.

I look forward to working together on that vital change programme to give farming and food production the long-term, sustainable future that we are all committed to delivering.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): Fibre production for the textile industry, using materials such as nettles, offers farmers an opportunity to support a sustainable supply chain, while strengthening their own businesses. Will the cabinet secretary consider supporting the development of regional textile brands based on sustainability credentials to incentivise that fibre production?

Mairi Gougeon: I thank the member for raising that point. If he has had approaches on that particular issue I would be more than happy to meet the people who are taking it forward and to see what we can do to develop and support that. Such initiatives are vital as we look to be more sustainable and to create a circular economy. If the member wants to contact me about that, I would be more than happy to look into it.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): One of the many areas that I am particularly proud of in the Green-Scottish Government agreement is the targets to expand organic food and farming, which will restore the environment and support rural economies. Does the cabinet secretary see those targets as helping to drive the demand for organic food in our schools and other public kitchens? Will it provide greater certainty for farmers that they can convert to organic food and farming, knowing that there is a stable market?

Mairi Gougeon: Absolutely. That is why we committed in the manifesto and the recent co-operation agreement to at least double the amount of land that is farmed organically by the end of the parliamentary session. Previously, we have seen that the amount of land that was being farmed organically was going in the wrong direction. That is why I am committed to working with the sector to see what we can do to improve that.

The member also mentioned some important initiatives that are making a difference, such as the food for life scheme, which has run for several years and which several local authorities take part in. We are keen to see what we can do to harness the procurement power that we have in the public sector to encourage the food for life scheme to expand into other areas and encourage organic production. We can see from the food for life scheme the many benefits that come from organic production, including improving our health and our local economies. We want to see how we can develop and build on that.

Mobile Abattoirs

3. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any progress that has been made on the use of mobile abattoirs. (S6O-00083)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The feasibility study that was commissioned by the Scottish Government and published in March last year provides details of what would be required to operate mobile abattoirs in Scotland, including the regulatory framework, and it offers a cost benefit analysis of possible operational models. However, the report also highlights the difficulty in achieving a sustained economic return from a mobile abattoir in Scotland. Any next steps would be for a commercial operator who wishes to take such a plan forward. The Scottish Government, in conjunction with Food Standards Scotland, would of course be willing to discuss that in more detail with any organisation that is considering operating mobile abattoirs in Scotland.

Martin Whitfield: In recent evidence to the United Kingdom Parliament's Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs minister Lord Benyon committed the UK Government to "supporting new initiatives" such as mobile abattoirs to help support local demand. The very report that the cabinet secretary mentioned recognised that there are areas of Scotland where animals have to be moved more than 100 miles before they reach an abattoir. Given that, as far back as January 2019, NFU Scotland highlighted that there has been a

"steady and worrying loss of small abattoirs"

over the past few years, when will the Scottish Government match the UK Government's commitment, and when will it happen?

Mairi Gougeon: As I outlined in my opening response, we wanted to undertake a study in this area to see whether it would be feasible, and we have committed to work with any operators who would be keen to take the model forward to see whether we could make it work in Scotland. I absolutely understand the point that the member has raised. Ideally, we want food to be processed as close as possible to the point of primary production, and we are keen to work with anyone who is willing to take the model forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a couple of supplementaries; I hope that both questions and answers will be brief.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): What support is the Scottish Government providing to Scotland's quality pig producer sector?

Mairi Gougeon: I was really pleased to announce on Monday this week that we have opened the Scottish Government's pig producers hardship support scheme for applications. The scheme will provide up to £715,000 of financial support to pig producers who were affected by the temporary closure of the abattoir in Brechin earlier this year. We have worked closely with the sector to ensure that the fund provides affected farmers with financial support for the losses that they incurred through no fault of their own. The scheme is open for applications until 26 September, and I encourage people to apply as soon as possible.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): We on the Conservative side of the chamber agree that mobile abattoirs are important. However, the Scottish National Party Government must support livestock farming to ensure its sustainability. Will the cabinet secretary confirm or deny that her civil servants suggested that Scottish livestock farmers should slaughter thousands of cattle, and will she tell members why the suckler beef climate group has been ignored since March?

Mairi Gougeon: As the member will know, I refuted that statement yesterday during the debate on the food and drink industry. I said that it was nonsense then, and it is still nonsense today.

Farm Support Payments

4. Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the future of farm support payments. (S6O-00084)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): On 25 August, as one of our first 100 days commitments, I announced the establishment of the agriculture reform implementation oversight board. It will contribute to the Scottish Government's work to implement policy reform through incorporating the relevant recommendations of the farmer-led groups to cut emissions across agriculture, support the production of sustainable high-quality food, and design a new support system and approach. A national test programme will include early progress on reducing livestock emissions, and the package should be implemented by spring 2022, with recruitment of farmers and crofters expected to begin this autumn.

Stephen Kerr: I thank the cabinet secretary for her reply, but farmers have little certainty about future payments, and the Scottish Government has been called out by Chris Stark, the chief executive officer of the United Kingdom Climate Change Committee, regarding the overdue national agriculture policy. Does she really think that new committees to replace old ones, and another consultation document, are the answer?

More deliberation and dilly-dallying is a disaster for the sector. Why will the Government not make decisions now?

Mairi Gougeon: We think that it is vital that we include in our decision making the people whom the decisions will affect. As I said, there now exists the agriculture reform implementation oversight board, which I will co-chair with the president of the NFU Scotland, Martin Kennedy, to drive forward the work of the farmer-led groups, which was an SNP manifesto commitment. That is what we have committed to, and that is exactly what the board will deliver. I have set out those actions today because we want the board to get to work and deliver.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We covered a lot of this ground in the debate yesterday, but I am keen to take two supplementaries.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the long-overdue establishment of the agriculture reform implementation oversight board and the proposals from the farmer-led groups, which I hope will be implemented. Given the Government's dithering over the past few years, and the fact that the cabinet secretary said that a lot of the proposals will not be introduced until 2022, is she absolutely confident that we will, over the next few years, meet the targets for reductions in agricultural emissions that are set out in the climate change plan?

Mairi Gougeon: I will, of course, do everything in my power to make sure that that happens, which is not to say that many of the measures will not be delivered next year. That is a specific piece of work for which we have tried to set out a timeline.

I want the agriculture reform implementation oversight board to get to work on delivering early on the recommendations of the farmer-led groups. It is only right that we involve farmers, crofters and land managers in discussions as we move forward to establish a new payment scheme for after 2024. It is important to have stability and simplicity to ensure that farmers can rely on the payments and know what is coming over the course of the next few years. It is also important to get going on tackling our emissions reductions. The sector is keen to get going on that and I want to work with it.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): How will the policy that the cabinet secretary will develop differ from that of the UK Government?

Mairi Gougeon: I note that the UK Government's spending review provides insufficient budget to replace European Union funding that is being lost to Scotland. There is still little clarity on replacement of EU programmes—in

particular, on structural funds. We get only a single-year guarantee from the UK, compared with the seven-year EU budget guarantee. There are also key concerns about the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, which represents a clear assault on devolved spending powers. Between now and 2024-25, Scotland will lose up to £170 million of funding, and the current one-year settlement does not provide the assurances that we need.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has announced a move away from direct payments and supporting food production to a focus on what it calls “public goods”. That is certainly not the direction in which we intend to go.

Agriculture (New Entrants)

5. Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to support new entrants to the agriculture sector. (S6O-00085)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Reports such as “Farming for 1.5°—From here to 2045” underline the stark challenges that Scottish agriculture faces. They highlight the continuing role for skilled and innovative young and new-entrant farmers and crofters. We agree with that view and we continue to support new entrants through a number of measures, including the farming opportunities for new entrants programme and the land matching service, which we fund the NFU Scotland to deliver.

The national reserve provides new farmers and crofters with an allocation of payment entitlements under the basic payment scheme, as well as the young farmers basic payment top-up. In line with our manifesto commitment, I will announce how we intend to support new and young entrants through a specific fund during this parliamentary session.

Pam Gosal: The importance of new entrants and young farmers cannot be overstated, nor can the importance of attracting applicants from all walks of life. With that in mind, what action is the Scottish Government taking to encourage black, Asian and minority ethnic applicants to the agriculture sector?

Mairi Gougeon: Pam Gosal has raised a vital point. It is right that we try to encourage diversity where possible. I would be more than happy to meet her to discuss actions that we can take in that regard.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): What is the Scottish Government doing to encourage more young people to get the skills and education that are needed to become farmers or crofters, or to take up other land-based career

opportunities in the Highlands and Islands, in order to tackle depopulation?

Mairi Gougeon: The Scottish Government recently announced the establishment of a commission for the land-based learning review, which was part of our first 100 days commitments. We intend that the review will consider the learning pipeline from early years to adults with a view to increasing opportunities for more people—in particular, more women—to gain qualifications and employment in the land-based and aquaculture sectors. Agriculture is one of the key sectors to be included in the review, which will support the Scottish Government’s ambition of delivering a just transition to net zero and a climate-resilient Scotland by ensuring that our learning system equips people with the skills and knowledge that are needed to work in Scotland’s land-based and aquaculture sectors.

United Kingdom Seasonal Workers Scheme

6. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands has had with the UK Government regarding the UK seasonal workers scheme. (S6O-00086)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Food production is critical to the success of our economy, and the edible horticulture sector has to be equipped with the necessary tools in order to continue to flourish. Unfortunately, the seasonal workers scheme is not working for employers or seasonal workers. Scottish ministers have listened to the sector and, on 16 March, the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment and the Minister for Europe and International Development wrote to the UK immigration minister, urging him to make the necessary improvements to that route to make it fit for purpose.

Despite migration impacting on devolved areas, the UK immigration minister has refused to recognise the interests of this Parliament and the role of the Scottish Government, and has failed to respond positively to 19 requests for meetings from the Scottish Government minister with responsibility for migration.

I have written to the UK Government this week to highlight the impacts of existing labour and skills shortages on the food and drink industry. I await a response to that.

Joe FitzPatrick: Over the past week I have met representatives of Dundee Cold Stores and Highland Game, which are in my constituency, and both of which are crucial businesses in the food supply chain that rely on being able to access sufficient labour, especially during the peak

season. The Food and Drink Federation Scotland warns that businesses are now rapidly approaching a crisis, and the NFU Scotland is calling for an improved permanent seasonal workers scheme.

Can the cabinet secretary offer an assurance that the Scottish Government will continue to make representations to the UK Government to ensure that both agriculture and the wider food and drink supply chain are able to recruit and retain the necessary staff, as well as to access haulage to get their products to market, on which both sectors depend?

Can I also ask the cabinet secretary whether she will visit—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary.

Mairi Gougeon: Joe FitzPatrick has highlighted an absolutely critical issue. Members will all have seen the letter—referenced in his question—that was sent from representatives of the food and drink industry to both the UK and Scottish Governments last week, highlighting the crisis situation that they now face in relation to labour. I have responded to the industry regarding our asks, and we will continue to work with it to assist in any way we can.

As I have just said, I have written to the UK Government this week to highlight the impact of existing labour and skills shortages on the food and drink industry. We also wrote to the UK Government in July to push for changes to UK migration policies and to highlight the impact of licensing delays for the heavy goods vehicle sector.

Scottish ministers will continue to discuss those issues in our on-going engagement with the UK Government and other devolved Governments, and we will continue to press for urgent action.

Seafood (Brexit Export Challenges)

7. **Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its engagement with the seafood sector regarding any export challenges as a result of Brexit. (S6O-00087)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): We have engaged regularly with the sector to mitigate the impact of European Union exit on seafood exports, and the impact's associated challenges. For instance, the food sector resilience group has met regularly to address the on-going challenges that EU exit has caused the Scottish seafood sector. In addition to that, the Scottish seafood exports task force, which included UK Government representation,

met regularly between February and July this year, and it published its final report on 26 August.

Over the summer, I met representatives of seafood businesses first hand and visited fish farms, fish markets and processing businesses to hear directly from those who work in the industry. My officials have been in regular contact with a range of industry representatives to discuss specific issues, such as the introduction of new export health certificates, and to explore medium-term and longer-term recommendations about how best to support the sector.

Karen Adam: Over recess, I visited Peterhead producers market and spoke with seafood industry leaders who are working hard to future proof the industry from the unmitigated disaster that is being inflicted by the damaging UK Government Brexit. Although the UK Government has clearly sold out Scotland's fishing communities, can the cabinet secretary outline what steps the Scottish Government is taking to mitigate the damage and to support seafood businesses to diversify in the face of the Brexit challenges?

Mairi Gougeon: Our local food strategy consultation and the development of a "Sustainably Scottish" brand will both support and grow Scottish seafood as a sustainable low-carbon food. Along with our work on a new seafood trade strategy, we have awarded £1.8 million to Seafood Scotland to revitalise the domestic market and to help to develop new global markets. We have also provided more than £800,000 for seafood businesses—including for storage facilities at a major seafood processor and for seafood businesses in the north-east—to develop seafood processing and training. In addition to that, £5.2 million was awarded to Peterhead Port Authority for harbour and market improvements.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): The seafood and other sectors in the northern isles have been battling Brexit disruption along with ferries' freight-capacity limitations. How does the Scottish Government plan to mitigate the twin challenges of Brexit and freight capacity on lifeline services, in order to ensure that produce can get to market on time?

Mairi Gougeon: I hope that I was able to address at least the first part of Beatrice Wishart's question in responses that I gave earlier. We are working tirelessly with the industry to try to mitigate the impact of Brexit and to do whatever we can to tackle it, but unfortunately many of the levers for that are simply outwith our control. On the freight issue, I urge Beatrice Wishart to raise it with the Minister for Transport, who I know has been looking at those issues and dealing with them.

Draft Co-operation Agreement (Protection for Farmers)

8. **Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will protect the interests of farmers under the draft co-operation agreement with the Scottish Green Party. (S6O-00088)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government and others across the chamber and the country believe that Scotland should be a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. We will ensure that we continue to support the sector to produce high-quality food while we take action to make the emissions reductions that are required to contribute to Scotland's world-leading emissions targets to support and deliver nature restoration and a just transition to net zero. I outlined my approach of having farmers, crofters and land managers at the heart of developing new policy, which is why I launched the agriculture reform implementation oversight board last week.

Oliver Mundell: Does the cabinet secretary understand the fear among farmers in my constituency that the Scottish Government now includes members who have previously advocated for a drastic reduction in livestock production and have talked up the prospect of covering 40 per cent of Scotland in forestry?

Mairi Gougeon: Similar points were raised during the food and drink debate yesterday. I would ask whether Oliver Mundell has read the co-operation agreement, in which we have outlined our approach. I have established the board to ensure that we can deliver the recommendations of the farmer-led groups and make sure that we have a sustainable future for Scottish farming.

Supporting the People of Afghanistan

14:56

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-01003, in the name of Angus Robertson, on supporting the people of Afghanistan.

14:56

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I will speak today about the situation in Afghanistan and particularly about what Scotland can do to support the Afghan people. I will take a moment to reflect on every life lost, every family displaced, every girl denied an education and every minority group now living in fear. The tragedy of Afghanistan is a tragedy of countless individuals and millions of families.

I will make three fundamental arguments, addressing first the humanitarian challenge, secondly how Scotland can play a full role in the resettlement of refugees and finally what Scotland, as a good global citizen, is and will be doing to support the people of Afghanistan and those who served in Afghanistan.

Over the course of the past 20 years, the United Kingdom has been instrumental in supporting the Government of Afghanistan both militarily and in building the civil society that improved the lives of so many people, but especially women and young girls, by supporting projects to improve education, healthcare, local governance and economic growth across the country. We must work together to protect what gains were made. The economy in Afghanistan was already fragile and the state was heavily dependent on foreign aid. That international assistance now hangs in the balance as we see the economy collapse.

As we can also see on our television screens every day, the human rights situation is extremely worrying. Women and girls and those who worked for foreign Governments or aid agencies are all threatened. The Taliban have a history of brutal discrimination against minority ethnic groups across Afghanistan, religious minorities, the LGBT community and others. More than 120,000 people were safely evacuated in recent weeks, thanks to the international effort at Kabul Airport. Scotland is forever grateful to all the service personnel of all nations who worked tirelessly and sacrificed so much in the service of their countries. Scotland also wants to recognise the dedicated work of diplomats and those in the humanitarian and aid

sector who have worked to bring Afghanistan a better future.

Now that the flights have ceased and there is no western presence in Afghanistan, we must ask ourselves: what can Scotland do now? We have heard this week that hundreds of people eligible for relocation remain in Afghanistan. The UK Government is speaking of dual nationals as if they were second-class citizens and has said that any Afghans who flee to neighbouring countries and later make the perilous journey to the UK, via the Channel, for a better life would still be subject to the Government's crackdown on boat crossings—as if the people of Afghanistan had not suffered enough.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government wrote to the Home Secretary yesterday to make clear our opposition to the UK Government's Nationality and Borders Bill. People who come to Scotland to seek sanctuary must be treated with dignity and respect at all times. Extremely vulnerable people, such as children or the victims of human trafficking, deserve a system that enables access to support rather than one that erects barriers. Not a system that, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is a violation of the 1951 refugee convention and will damage lives.

Today, millions of Afghans throughout the country are in dire need of humanitarian assistance, with 3.5 million internally displaced persons. As a result of decades of conflict, drought and the impact of the pandemic, 14 million people are food insecure.

I will address how Scotland will play a full role in refugee settlement and I start by looking back at how Scotland welcomed and supported Syrian refugees. Six years ago, Scottish local authorities led the way in welcoming refugees who were fleeing the horror of conflict in Syria. The first flight bringing refugees to the UK for resettlement landed in Glasgow on a dark and dreich day in November 2015. At that time, few local authorities in Scotland had experience in supporting refugees, but that is no longer the case. I am proud to say that, in the intervening years, every local authority of every hue in Scotland has welcomed and supported refugees. More than 3,500 people have arrived and have been rebuilding their lives in their new communities, bringing with them skills and cultures from which we all benefit. I thank local authority teams who have made that possible, as well as the many third sector, community and faith organisations and members of the public who have worked tirelessly to provide the friendship and support that people need as they settle in their new home country.

Therefore, today, Scotland is standing by to play a full role in providing a home for Afghans. In

principle, I welcome the UK Government's announcement of the new Afghan citizens resettlement programme, as well as operation warm welcome.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): First, I refer members to my entry in the register of interests, as a non-executive director of the Reduce Explosive Violence Increase Victim Empowerment—REVIVE—campaign, which was set up to advocate for victims of explosive weapons.

With regard to operation warm welcome, will the cabinet secretary note that recent statistics, which were exposed by *Byline Times*, show that, of Afghans who have been given refugee status in the UK since 2009, only 18 per cent were women and girls and, of the under-18s, only 15 per cent were girls. Therefore, will the cabinet secretary join me in noting that the rights of women merit some attention? Will he commit to asking the Home Office to ensure that equitable proportions of women and girls are given refugee status?

Angus Robertson: Yes, I entirely agree with my colleague. There is a lot more work to be done on that, and I will come on immediately to talk about the scale of the challenge, as well as the opportunity and responsibility that we have to maximise the support that we give to Afghans, especially women and girls.

We understand that the current commitment to take 20,000 people over five years in the UK, with only 5,000 in the first year, is nowhere near enough. We have all seen the devastating scenes at Kabul airport.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angus Robertson: I will, and then I will have to make some progress.

Stephen Kerr: Will he join me in pleading with the European Union for its member countries to accept Afghan refugees at least on the same scale of numbers that will be accepted as part of the plan that the UK Government has promoted?

Angus Robertson: Of course, I am pleased to call on all countries to play their part. I remember the contribution that was made in relation to Syria. Proportionately, the countries that accepted most refugees from Syria were Sweden, Austria and then Germany; somewhere further down the list was the United Kingdom.

Stephen Kerr: Afghans! Afghans!

Angus Robertson: We have more to do, but I am pleased that we can aspire to taking in more Afghans and I hope that we can agree on that point. Mr Kerr can perhaps join with other parties

in this Parliament in calling for the numbers to be raised.

The Scottish Government is also deeply concerned about the fate of Afghans who contributed to British aid efforts and supported western efforts to enhance human rights, but are not prioritised for resettlement. We must support those who supported us, but have been left behind.

We will continue to work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Home Office, local authorities and other partners to provide the safety and security that refugees need to rebuild their lives. The new Scots refugee integration strategy, led in partnership with COSLA and the Scottish Refugee Council, provides a framework for welcoming refugees in Scotland. It ensured that Scotland was prepared for resettlement in 2015 and continues to underpin our approach. We believe that integration begins from day one and that everyone in our communities has a part to play.

Scottish local authorities have been welcoming Afghans who worked for British forces or other UK Government institutions, along with their families, for a number of years now. That experience, along with that which has been gained through the resettlement of refugees from the conflict in Syria, will be invaluable in welcoming people into our communities.

I am pleased to be able to give the following update on Scotland's offer to Afghans resettling here. Before June 2021, five Scottish local authorities had already welcomed nearly 400 people under the Afghan locally employed staff scheme, since 2014. From the point when arrivals were stepped up in late June 2021, until the end of August, a further 43 families—around 160 individuals—arrived in Scotland across eight local authority areas. A further 20 families, comprising approximately 70 individuals, are expected to arrive in the first weeks of this month. Scottish local authorities have offered a further 40 properties thus far—we are at a very early stage—which are ready to be matched to 40 more families who have recently arrived in the UK.

To date, 18 local authorities have confirmed their commitment to resettlement going forward. Others are still going through internal processes to confirm their position. Scottish council leaders have unanimously agreed that Scottish local government should support the locally employed staff and refugee resettlement schemes. Local authorities need more detail, however, on the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme and operation warm welcome, to enable councils to make further decisions on longer-term commitments and participation. [*Interruption.*] I

must make progress, because of an announcement that I will make to the chamber.

The Scottish Refugee Council set up the new Scots connect network in 2019. The network now brings together 195 community and voluntary groups from across Scotland, working to support and welcome new Scots in their communities. Some 145 groups have already registered their willingness to participate in an Afghan support network, which will outline the services and support that they are able to provide. The SRC has received over 250 inquiries from individuals offering practical skills and donations. The SRC is currently directing offers of clothing, children's toys and household goods to organisations in the new Scots connect network. People, including anybody watching this who wishes to do so, can register their offers of support online. The SRC is working closely with COSLA and the local authorities that are responsible for accommodating and supporting new arrivals.

I stress that the Scottish Government's support for Afghan refugees is significant. That is why I announce to the Parliament that the Scottish Government has made £250,000 available from our humanitarian emergency fund to provide critical help to the people of Afghanistan. That is additional to the financial commitment that the Scottish people have already made to the UK's aid budget through tax contributions. We are in close contact with our humanitarian partners on the fund's panel to explore ways in which that funding can be delivered safely and effectively to support those on the ground.

As we debate today how best to support the people of Afghanistan, I ask that we all remember that a person's right to live in peace, dignity and security should not depend on what they can offer the economy of another country. We must ask ourselves, if those were our mothers, daughters, sisters, brothers, sons and fathers, what would we want another country to do to help? I believe that Scotland is ready to help, and we will act.

I commend the motion to all members. I hope that there is cross-party agreement on this important day.

I move,

That the Parliament records its alarm at the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Afghanistan following the return of the Taliban; further records its deep concern about the threat to life, liberty, equality, and human rights to all in Afghanistan and, in particular, for women and girls and minority communities; commends the Armed Forces, service personnel, and humanitarian agencies involved in supporting people during the evacuation; notes the UK's long history of involvement with, and intervention in, Afghanistan, and, in consequence, the obligation that the UK has to assist and support all those who are at risk of persecution or mistreatment as a result of the current crisis; recognises the lead role internationally that the UK

Government must play in ensuring that aid continues to reach those who need it most and condemns the reduction in international aid by the UK Government from 0.7% of Gross National Income to 0.5%; urges the UK Government to ensure that those Afghans who have worked to provide critical aid assistance, uphold democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Afghanistan, can be allowed to settle in the UK alongside those who are at risk of violence and persecution as outlined in the UN Refugee Convention, and recognises that Scotland has a duty to play a full role in assisting the resettlement and relocation of Afghans at risk and providing humanitarian assistance, and that anyone settling in Scotland will be welcome members of the community.

15:08

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I appreciate the opportunity to open for the Scottish Conservatives in this timely and important debate. It is also the first time that I have appeared in a debate in the chamber with the cabinet secretary. I very belatedly welcome him to the Parliament and to his post.

I begin my remarks by paying tribute to our armed forces, and particularly those members of them who have served in Afghanistan since the beginning of the conflict, who have given so much in order that the people of Afghanistan could live in relative stability over the past 20 years. I especially pay my respects, and those of my party, to the 457 UK armed forces personnel who lost their lives in the pursuit of democracy for the Afghan people. We remember them today, we think of their families and we thank them for their unswerving courage in the service of our country in making the ultimate sacrifice.

I also acknowledge the 2,200 personnel who sustained injuries during the conflict. As an aside at this point, I note that we welcome the announcement that the UK Government will be investing a further £2.7 million in mental health support for our veterans as part of the wider operation courage programme.

I know that I speak for everyone on the Conservative benches—and, I hope, for others across the Parliament—when I say that we are all indebted to our armed forces, who strive to keep our country safe and work so hard to help others. Not only must their achievements in Afghanistan over the past 20 years be commended, but the ability of our armed forces and diplomatic services to swiftly evacuate some 15,000 people to the UK in extremely difficult circumstances and a very tight timeframe, as we saw in recent weeks, was second to none.

Michelle Thomson: I note what Donald Cameron is saying about the swift removal of the services. However, does he agree that the hardware left for deployment by the Taliban—by the US military, it is suggested—including 22,000

Humvees, 64,000 machine guns, 350,000 assault rifles, 33 Blackhawk helicopters, 176 artillery pieces and 126,000 pistols, can only be considered a cause for concern for global security?

Donald Cameron: I agree that that is a cause for concern, and I will address elements of the withdrawal in due course.

I acknowledge the sacrifice of the Afghan people—particularly those who worked with our armed forces to try to make Afghanistan a better place in which to live. The long involvement of the UK and, it should be said, 50 or so other nations who participated in Afghanistan over the past 20 years allowed free elections to take place, women and girls to receive an education and an international effort that began to stabilise that part of the world following the brutal attacks on the USA in 2001.

In spite of those achievements, it is depressing and deeply regrettable that, following the exit of American and British military personnel, Afghanistan has spiralled so quickly back to where it was some 20 years ago. The rapid return and rise to power of the Taliban has clearly taken the world by surprise. Despite the promise of more leniency from the new Taliban regime compared with its first time in power, the initial signs are not good. We watch and wait.

It is right that questions are asked of every national Government involved about what went so wrong in Afghanistan. The recent US-led withdrawal from Afghanistan, which we have seen played out in the media, should make us consider the sense and worth of our involvement in that country and of policies pursued by successive Governments at home and abroad up to and including the past few months.

In particular, we should query why the Biden Administration pursued its policy of complete military withdrawal and what assumptions were made about the ensuing consequences, and what our future foreign and diplomatic policy should be when it comes to Afghanistan and the surrounding areas.

There are many questions to ask, but we are here this afternoon principally to discuss Scotland's role in supporting the 25,000 or so Afghan civilians whom the UK will be welcoming over the coming years. It is notable that the UK had already taken in some 36,000 Afghans before the current crisis developed. As a country, we have a proud history of welcoming refugees to our shores, and we have a truly diverse and multicultural society as a result.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Does Mr Cameron believe that consideration should now be given to providing

indefinite leave to remain to Afghans already living in the UK so that genuine refugees are not forced to return to Taliban-run Afghanistan?

Donald Cameron: I will come to that point. I will consider various issues under it, so I will return to it.

We welcome that proud history, even in the dire circumstances that lead some people to seek refuge in our country.

There is much in what the cabinet secretary has just said that I support, especially in terms of welcoming refugees to Scotland. However, I register my profound disappointment that, in the debate and in his motion, he directly “condemns ... the UK Government” in relation to international aid. That makes it very difficult for Conservative members to support the motion as it stands. If there was ever a moment for the Scottish National Party to resist—just once—the temptation to score a political point, this was it. If there was ever a moment for the SNP to allow the Scottish Parliament to come together at an important and, indeed, tragic time, this was it.

Let me touch briefly—*[Interruption.]*—I am afraid that I have to crack on.

On the topic of international aid, for decades, the United Kingdom has been at the forefront of helping some of the poorest and most vulnerable people from around the world. The Scottish Conservatives have long supported the UK’s commitment to spending 0.7 per cent of gross national income on international aid, and, although we acknowledge the reasons behind the temporary reduction to 0.5 per cent, we call on the UK Government to reinstate its long-term commitment to 0.7 per cent as soon as is practically possible. Personally speaking, I hope that that moment comes very quickly indeed.

There is, of course, more to international aid than questions of funding. Recently, the UK has led the world in this regard, and the pandemic has shone a spotlight on what we can do. Our contribution includes the UK being the biggest bilateral donor to the Global Partnership for Education, which is the largest fund in the world that is dedicated to improving education in developing countries. Then there is our contribution to the COVAX advance market commitment, the international initiative to support global and, more importantly, equitable access to vaccines. At £548 million, we have made one of the largest donations, which is helping to support the roll-out of 1.8 billion vaccines doses by early 2022 for up to 92 developing countries.

I turn to the issue of refugees. The cabinet secretary has welcomed operation warm welcome, which was announced yesterday and which seeks to ensure that Afghans who are arriving in the UK

receive the vital support that they need to rebuild their lives, find work, pursue education and integrate into local communities across the country. I strongly welcome that, and I am encouraged by the detailed and varied forms of support that are on offer to ensure that those who are coming to the UK from Afghanistan can seamlessly become part of our society.

We welcome the commitment to invest £200 million to meet the costs of the first year of the Afghanistan citizens resettlement scheme and the further commitment to ensure that Afghans who worked closely with the UK armed forces and Government in Afghanistan, often at great personal risk, will receive immediate and indefinite leave to remain. To address Kenny Gibson’s point, the UK Government has also confirmed that the 8,000-plus people who have relocated to the UK under the new Afghanistan relocations and assistance policy will be able to apply to convert their temporary leave to remain into indefinite leave. In my view, that is the right and proper course of action to protect Afghans who put themselves and their families in danger by assisting our military and diplomatic endeavours, because it is our duty to provide safety and protection for those who come to the UK from likely persecution.

Kenneth Gibson: Will the member give way?

Donald Cameron: I am in my final minutes. I must move on.

The UK Government has announced a raft of additional social measures to support Afghan citizens who come to the UK, including £12 million to provide additional school places and an additional £3 million to support access to the NHS. I hope that the Scottish Government will make a similar commitment. Perhaps the Government will return to that point when the cabinet secretary closes.

I will sum up by reinforcing the point that the Scottish Conservatives will support the efforts of Scotland’s Governments in welcoming Afghans to our country. We believe that the package of measures that the UK Government has put together will ensure that those who are coming to the UK will be able to build a new life here. We must also ensure that we properly support our veterans, our serving personnel and the families of those who lost their lives serving their country as a result of this tragic conflict.

I move amendment S6M-01003.2, to leave out from “, in consequence” to “UN Refugee Convention” and insert:

“acknowledges the significant effort and sacrifices made by the UK armed forces, including the 457 personnel who lost their lives and the 2,200 personnel who were injured, and the Afghan people, in ensuring relative stability in

Afghanistan over the course of the last 20 years; welcomes the announcement of Operation Warm Welcome by the UK Government, which seeks to ensure that those arriving from Afghanistan to the UK have the opportunity to rebuild their lives, find work, seek education and become part of their local communities; acknowledges that the UK Government has committed £200 million to meet the cost of the first year of the Afghanistan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme, which aims to welcome up to 20,000 Afghans; understands that the UK Government has also committed £2.7 million to additional mental health support for veterans as part of Operation Courage; calls on the UK Government to reinstate its long-term financial commitment to international aid at 0.7% of Gross National Income as soon as is practicably possible”.

15:17

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to debate what we can do now to support the people of Afghanistan. The debate must be about our responsibilities to the people of a country that we have been involved with for 20 years, and today we need to unite as a Parliament and show our support for humanitarian action, the civil rights of the Afghan people and women's rights, in particular.

We do not have time to debate the wider lessons that need to be learned from the 20 years of our involvement in Afghanistan. For that reason, I welcome the call for the restoration of UK spending on international aid to be reinstated by the Tory Government in the amendment that Donald Cameron has moved today. However, that cut should never have been made. It demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding of the vital nature of international aid and support in Afghanistan and across the world.

I hope that everyone who is in the chamber is thinking about the women who are now being denied the opportunity to live their lives without fear, of all the young girls who benefited from education in the past 20 years but might never get the chance to show the world their contributions to society, of the work of our armed forces and all those who worked incredibly hard to keep those who were seeking to flee Afghanistan the best chance to get to the UK, of all those who made the ultimate sacrifice in service of their country and in the belief that they were building something better, and of those in charities and development organisations who are still in Afghanistan, helping people on the ground and putting their own lives at risk.

We now have a crisis of global proportions and one that requires a joined-up international response. As an immediate priority, people who are fleeing Afghanistan need to be able to cross the border into neighbouring countries, NATO should be called on to offer logistical assistance where that would be helpful, and western democracies must offer financial support to those

nations. European countries need to support that effort by opening their borders, and we, in the UK, must play our part in that. It is especially urgent that the UK Government steps up to ensure that people who have the right to British citizenship are supported and that those who claim asylum are helped. We must honour the work of everyone who has been involved in our diplomatic and military operations in the country.

I stand with my Labour colleague Lisa Nandy MP in demanding that the UK Government does not abandon the thousands of people who have been left behind in Afghanistan and that it increases the resources that it is deploying to help refugees to reach safety in the UK. The stories from MPs about the failure to connect with people who have been getting in touch are appalling. In that respect, the Lib Dem amendment's call for the UK Government to lift the overall cap on the number of people we should be supporting is important and needs urgent action.

I thank the Scottish Refugee Council for the work that it has done and for its excellent briefing, which highlights the need for a change of direction from the UK Government and calls on all of us to share responsibility in our actions to address the scale of the situation and the number of Afghan refugees who need our support.

The Labour councillor for Roxeth in Harrow, Peymana Assad, came to the UK as a refugee from Afghanistan at the age of three. This week, she spoke passionately about our collective sense of duty to a country that is living in fear. It is vital that refugees are given the opportunity to work when they settle in our country so that they can contribute their skills to our economy and our communities. Across the UK, we have witnessed the benefits that refugees bring to our communities when they are allowed to participate in our society. That has been evident most recently in the number of successful businesses and community groups that have been set up by Syrians who fled the civil war and persecution in their country.

In turn, we, in Scotland, need to welcome refugees and, in doing so, support local community groups such as the Welcoming Association here, in Edinburgh, which make the transition to life in Scotland successful for everyone.

It is vital that our councils are properly funded so that they can welcome those people who choose to settle here. In the past few days, I have spoken to my Labour colleagues on the City of Edinburgh Council. They have previously raised the need for funding to assist them in addressing the issue of homelessness in our city. They estimate that there is already a gap of £9.5 million, which should have been received during the Covid emergency. The

Scottish Government must not short change people in Edinburgh who need help to find a home, including the people who are arriving here from Afghanistan, whom we all need to help. I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

I call on the Scottish Government to provide the targeted support that our councils need to ensure that refugees who arrive in Scotland are given the life and the opportunities that they deserve and not just rhetoric, however good it is. Our amendment highlights the importance of our local authorities, community organisations and individual citizens in ensuring that every refugee is given the support that they need, now and in the future, to ensure that their new lives in Scotland are successful.

Afghanistan is divided, it is suffering economic collapse and its people are living in fear. The Taliban say that they have changed, but most commentators very much doubt that. The world is watching. Aid and support that have been pledged from countries across the world need to be delivered to the people who need them instead of going into the pockets of warlords. As well as supporting people to come to Scotland and the UK, we need to play a progressive role in speaking up for humanitarian assistance and support for human rights—especially women's rights—and for democracy.

I move amendment S6M-01003.3, to insert at end:

“, and recognises the importance of Scottish local authorities, community organisations and individual citizens in helping ensure a successful transition for every refugee.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a little time in hand, so I encourage members to make and take interventions. Those who take interventions will get the time back.

15:24

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am very grateful to the Government for the motion that we are debating and for the tone of the speeches of the parties that we have heard from so far, which underlines the humanitarian catastrophe that we are witnessing in the part of the world in question.

I will start my remarks by reflecting on an aspect of my life that I do not often talk about in the chamber—that is, my Quakerism. I am slightly agnostic when it comes to religion, but I am a Quaker by choice rather than birthright.

I have always grappled with military intervention and I have marched against it and against wars, but two weeks ago I found myself in the strange position of actively hoping that our troops would remain on the ground in Afghanistan.

As the Taliban advanced across the country towards Kabul, the images and individual stories were absolutely harrowing. I was reminded of the words of the author Warsan Shire, who said:

“no one leaves home
unless home is the mouth of a shark”.

Babies were passed over walls by parents making the hardest decision they will ever have to make. People waded through a sewage canal to get to the gates of an airport, holding documents that they would never have the chance to show to anyone. British passports and letters of invitation to the UK were ignored and left to fall apart in the sewage. People stayed at those gates despite warnings of an imminent terror attack, and they stayed during and after an attack that robbed dozens in the queues in front of them of their lives.

If they were lucky enough to get through all of that unscathed, people got on flights with no possessions except the clothes on their backs. Some had no idea where the flight was even going, as long as it carried them over the Afghan border. In scenes that none of us will ever forget, some clung to the outside of moving jets with no hope of survival. That is an act of desperation. Terror, persecution, oppression, abuse and violence drive people to do that to have just a shot at evacuation and escape.

The Taliban have tried to reassure the world that they and their world view have changed, but aspects of their language and the actions that they are taking give the lie to those assurances. They are not schoolboys. For want of a better phrase, the Taliban are a death cult. They stone gay men or crush them to death. They cut the tips off women's fingers and they persecute and beat women in the street for supposed transgressions. They have a twisted view of what they believe to be Sharia law. They are brutal mediaevalists.

We spend a lot of time here focusing on where we disagree. I whole-heartedly hope that each of us recognises our duty to the people of Afghanistan. We cannot leave them on their own to fight for survival and basic human rights. I recognise that our military presence in Afghanistan has ended, but the humanitarian support and safe harbour that we offer to the people of that country must continue.

I support the Scottish Government's motion today. It mirrors the arguments being made by Liberal Democrats in this Parliament and at Westminster. My amendment sets out how I would like the UK and Scottish Governments to go still further. The UK Government should urgently expand its plans for the resettlement of Afghan refugees. It has offered to provide sanctuary to 20,000 people. The scenes already described today show why we cannot wait for four or five

years. This crisis is happening now. Given its scale, 20,000 people should be the starting point, not the limit, of our ambition; it should be the floor, not the ceiling.

That is why I want the Scottish Government to share evidence of the support that it can make available and of the resources that it can gather or dedicate. I do not doubt the Government's credentials on the matter or the scope of its desire to make a difference. I welcome that. Those who arrive will need physical and mental healthcare. We have heard about some of that already. They will need housing, guardians, translators, education and more. They have faced enormous suffering and trauma. I ask the Scottish Government to guarantee that it is ready to assist in cross-party, cross-Parliament and cross-sector work to persuade the UK Government to lift its ambitions. If Scottish ministers produce and share guarantees of Scotland's readiness, that could help to enable Scotland to provide safe harbour to thousands more.

I am grateful for Sarah Boyack's kind words about our amendment. Her amendment aligns with mine in recognising the important role of local authorities, the third sector and other stakeholders.

However, the warm words in the Scottish Conservatives' amendment cannot hide the devastation caused by the decisions of Boris Johnson and Dominic Raab or by those of President Biden and others. Although Donald Cameron made an excellent speech, it is undermined by the conflict that exists in his party over the 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product aid commitment. I welcome his call for his colleagues south of the border to increase that. I hope that they listen to him.

The UK and US Governments have left the people of Afghanistan, particularly women and girls, to the Taliban. It is a betrayal, and their decisions have left thousands fearing for their lives. How many UK nationals and Afghans were left behind? Why did we wait so long to start evacuating interpreters if we knew that this was coming? They worked with our troops and officials for 20 years. There is no hiding that this is the biggest foreign policy disaster in decades.

Every Scottish Conservative should be ashamed by their part in surrendering the UK's position of leadership and strength on international aid. Only a handful of countries met the UN's 0.7 per cent target and, thanks to the Lib Dems putting it into law, the UK was one of them. That commitment has been shed, and it is not just Afghanistan that will suffer. In Yemen, where aid is being halved, 400,000 children under five are at risk of starving to death. Aid cuts to that country

are a death sentence, according to the UN secretary general.

Michelle Thomson: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is just concluding, but—

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am happy to take an intervention if there is time, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Okay.

Michelle Thomson: I note that London is soon to host the world's biggest arms fair. Surely, given the member's comments and points, which many of us agree on, what we actually need to be hosting is the world's biggest humanitarian fair.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: As I am a Quaker, it will come as no surprise to Michelle Thomson that I utterly agree with her on that.

I will finish by quoting the words of a teacher in Kabul who previously worked as an interpreter for the international forces. He said:

"I sleep 10 minutes, then I wake up. I sleep 15 minutes, then I wake up ... I am feeling tremendous fear ... When they"—

that is, the Taliban—

"announce their government I'm sure they'll be killing us".

Our words will mean nothing to the Afghans if we do not deliver with our actions.

I move amendment S6M-01003.1, to insert at end

“; urges the UK Government to expand urgently its plans for the resettlement of 20,000 Afghan refugees, with a new plan to provide immediate sanctuary to people fleeing persecution, oppression and terror, instead of spreading assistance over five years; believes that the resettlement of 20,000 people should be the starting point instead of the final target, and urges the Scottish Government, in light of the immediate human need, to share proactively evidence of the number that it can resettle and provide effective support and services to, including the capacity to provide physical and mental healthcare, housing, guardians, translators and education, providing guarantees that the Scottish Government and public authorities across Scotland are ready to assist, in order to help persuade the UK Government to lift the overall cap and enable Scotland to provide sanctuary to thousands.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I call Kaukab Stewart, to be followed by Pam Gosal. Ms Stewart, you have six minutes.

15:32

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I, too, thank the Scottish Government for showing much-needed urgency in lodging the motion for debate. I speak today not only as an elected member, but as a Pakistani immigrant—to England, originally; I then moved to Scotland, where I have been made to feel welcome.

The scenes that we are witnessing in Afghanistan at present depict nothing short of a man-made humanitarian and human rights disaster. Having invaded the country 20 years ago, the UK and its international partners are now abandoning the very people they have long claimed to be protecting. Just as in Britain's imperial past, the UK has never understood the people or the country that it has occupied. There is nothing great about a Britain that abdicates its responsibilities and leaves thousands to the mercies of a cruel and barbarous regime. It is therefore the Conservative Government's moral and ethical responsibility to offer every support to those who are seeking asylum.

The human cost of the crisis is impacting my constituents right now. Only last week, I spoke with members of the Afghan community in Glasgow, and they did not know whether their families were alive or dead. At that time, most of them were hiding from the Taliban in Kabul. Perhaps most difficult to hear were people's fears for their daughters, sisters and mothers. The tension in the room was palpable, and it reminded me of my experiences as a teacher working specifically with children and families who were forced to seek asylum in Glasgow. Families who have had to flee their home country in fear of death or worse have felt safe in my city, and I was privileged to assist them in rebuilding their lives.

Moving forward, it will be critical that the young Afghan people we welcome have access to specialist trauma support as well as language and social supports to help them to settle in the UK. Given that the crisis was entirely the creation of the UK Government and its partners, the UK Government must in turn provide the additional funding that is necessary to fully support these children.

The Afghan community representatives I spoke to were clear about what they need. They emphasised the necessity for the UK Government to put in place a fast-track process for existing Afghan asylum applications in the UK, of which there are more than 3,000 at present, and the triggering of family reunion rights, which need to be extended beyond spouses and children under 18. Furthermore, there should be no immigration returns to Afghanistan, asylum support cessations or evictions of Afghans.

Worryingly, the ideological war waged by the Conservative Party has left the UK aid budget ill-prepared for the current pressure that it faces. Even overseas development and aid programmes focusing on the education and health of women and girls have been cut.

Angus Robertson: I observe that every political party that has taken part in the debate so far—apart from the Conservatives, who are coming on

to the issue later—has given a commitment to Afghans who are already in the United Kingdom, so that those who are genuine refugees, whom I imagine are the vast majority, should not be returned to Taliban-led Afghanistan. Does Kaukab Stewart agree that it would be helpful if, in the winding-up speeches, we could have the commitment of all parties, including the Conservative Party, on that important point?

Kaukab Stewart: I absolutely agree with the cabinet secretary on that point and I look forward to hearing that in everyone's winding-up speeches.

As I was saying, there has been a cut from 0.7 to 0.5 per cent of gross domestic product. That sounds like a tiny percentage, but it would make a massive difference to the Afghans in desperate need of support at present and in the months to come. Indeed, even the UK's current commitment to take 20,000 Afghan refugees does not tell the whole story. In reality, the UK has committed to take only 5,000 Afghans in 2021, which is woefully inadequate.

There is also a clear and present domestic danger to all refugees, including fleeing Afghans, from the Home Office's Nationality and Borders Bill. If passed in its current form, the bill will sever the UK's relationship with the refugee convention. For 70 years, the convention, which was created and shaped by Britain after the Holocaust, enshrined an individual's right to seek refuge—a basic human right. Instead of sheltering the most vulnerable, the new UK immigration agenda aims to criminalise refugees who arrive on our shores by "irregular means of travel".

Compare that to the position of the Scottish Government, which has used the refugee convention and human rights as the foundations of the new Scots refugee integration policy, with dignity for all at its core. As Scotland prepares to welcome those fleeing the Taliban, we are incredibly lucky that our local authorities, such as Glasgow City Council, have been opening their doors to the world's evacuees for more than 20 years.

The UNESCO chair in refugee integration through languages and the arts highlighted that a key to the success that it has enjoyed in Glasgow in integrating our refugee population—the highest per head in the whole of the UK—has been respecting a key objective of the Global Compact on Refugees: enhancing refugee self-reliance. It will be vital that partnership working with local refugee support groups and the Scottish Afghan refugee associations are co-ordinated to achieve that. In that vein, it is welcome indeed that the Scottish Government has reiterated its commitment to work with partners at all levels in

order to provide refugees with the support and safety that they need to rebuild their lives.

The UK Government must hold true to its international obligations under the refugee convention and the Global Compact on Refugees. Anything short of that would be a complete moral failure and a clear demonstration that people cannot trust the UK when they need its support the most.

15:38

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): At the start, I would like to say that this is a personal and sensitive speech. I might have some time at the end for interventions, but I will not be taking any otherwise, as I would like to make progress with my speech.

It is with great sadness that, after 20 years of our intervention in Afghanistan, we are standing here today watching the liberties of innocent people and those who helped us being taken away. Under the Taliban, things will go backwards. Let us be clear: the Taliban have not changed. Women who had gained liberty and had a future now fear for their lives. Girls who could go to school, get an education and build a future will now be a lost generation. Women who could stand for elections will now be sidelined.

Literally overnight, the fragile democracy that has been built up over 20 years has been shattered. The haunting images of terrified Afghans fleeing Kabul airport, desperately seeking refuge from the terror that awaited them, are unlikely to escape our memory any time soon. I am sure that there are many women in the chamber today who have been told at some point, "You can't do that," or told that, as a woman, they do not have the same rights and opportunities as men. I certainly have. It is not something that we ever forget. The thought of young girls being robbed of their education and freedom is difficult to comprehend.

I know that all of us in the chamber will look at the images coming from Afghanistan and feel a range of emotions, from sadness to helplessness. More than anything, though, I am angry. That is how I feel, as a woman, knowing that so many young Afghan girls will never go to school. They will never be able to forge their own paths, simply because they are women. We gave those women and girls hope. We gave them jobs and careers, and the prospect of a brighter future. We gave them a voice, all to be taken away by the medieval mindset of the Taliban rule. Those same women are being silenced and their futures are being stolen. We are now their voice.

I am sure that we have all heard the stories of women burning their diplomas and degree

certificates to hide the fact that they were educated. I ask members to imagine for a moment that it is their daughter desperately concealing her education to avoid extreme punishment for having had the audacity to go to school. It is a horrible thought, but the daughters of Afghanistan will be punished by the Taliban—make no mistake about that.

Although there is plenty of blame to go around, we must all focus on the here and now. Responsibility for responding to the crisis sits with all of us. We must focus on helping to rebuild the lives of Afghans and their families who come to the United Kingdom. I welcome the UK Government's commitment to resettle 20,000 Afghan refugees in the UK, most notably interpreters and other individuals who have helped our armed forces. I also welcome the fact that people whose lives were deemed to be threatened by the Taliban are being offered indefinite leave to remain in the UK. That is the right decision.

Even before the crisis, though, the UK had taken in more than 36,000 Afghans since 1996. It is right that we should open our refugee scheme and make it accessible to all those who need it. I know that Scotland will play its part. Scotland's councils and voluntary organisations have risen to this sort of challenge before and they will do it again. Already, people across the country have responded to calls asking for donations of clothes, nappies, toys, prams, pans, kitchen utensils and so on.

There is, of course, a role for our brave armed forces and diplomats who were on the ground in Afghanistan. They faced extraordinary danger, with the enemy at their gates, working day and night to get as many people out as they could. Despite a very real threat to their lives, they continued the exemplary level of professionalism that they are famed for worldwide. Once again, they have made our country proud and earned a place in the history books. I applaud and thank them.

Let us not forget that this is not the end; it is the beginning. The question that we must attend to is what comes next. People have been left behind and we must do all what we can to help them.

In closing, I want to talk about the devastation that now plagues Afghanistan. The figure that stands out for me is that for 15 consecutive years the number of free countries in the world has declined. Let us take a moment to think about that figure—it is shocking.

One thing on which we all agree, no matter what our politics are, is that we have a responsibility not to turn our backs on those who need our help, whether they are former Afghan service personnel, women and girls or people from minority

communities. There is much to do, but that is what Scotland is all about.

15:45

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Many of my constituents are Afghan families who, over the past few weeks and months, have been on the phone to loved ones, family members, friends and neighbours in Afghanistan, worried sick about their safety. The everyday reality of those parents, brothers, sisters and children is often to hide and regularly move from house to house to escape the clutches of the Taliban. Those precious phone calls to tell relatives that they are loved, and to hear that they are still alive and safe for the time being, but always at risk, not only are heartbreaking but tell a different story from the public face that the Taliban seek to present to the outside world and the international community.

Glasgow Afghans know the truth. They speak daily to friends and loved ones who face the reality on the ground. A constituent's brother was in Baghlan province, saw his district overrun by the Taliban and was put in jail to await the arrival of a Taliban officer who was going to question him. Before that happened however, a counterattack by the Northern Alliance, which still fights against the Taliban today, retook the area and the prisoner was freed. Had that counterattack been delayed by a single day, my constituent's brother would now be dead.

My constituent's brother is now desperately trying to make his way overland out of Afghanistan to a place of safety. Sadly, the district in Baghlan province is currently back in Taliban control for the time being. What is a safe route out of Afghanistan for my constituent's brother? He clearly cannot return to Afghanistan if, God willing, he makes it out to safety in the first place. He has family in Glasgow. What has he done to be under threat? He was supporting the Afghan national police force to bring law and order, peace, safety and security to the nation; now, his life is in peril. Should he make it to the UK, it would be an outrage to see him criminalised under the UK Government's Nationality and Borders Bill—Maggie Chapman's amendment highlights the issue.

The experience of my constituent's brother also highlights the fact that the Taliban may control most of the country but it does not control it all. Panjshir province continues to hold out against it, and Ahmad Massoud, son of Afghan national hero Ahmad Shah Massoud, leads that resistance. Shah Massoud held off both the Soviets and the Taliban before his assassination in 2001.

Today's motion talks about recognising

“the lead role internationally that the UK Government must play in ensuring that aid continues to reach those who need it most”.

In that context, I welcome the £250,000 humanity emergency fund that the Scottish Government announced to support those in great need, which is, as the cabinet secretary pointed out, an additional financial commitment to that which the Scottish people already make to the UK's aid budget through tax contributions.

Of course, aid to Afghanistan needs to go to as many people as possible who are in great danger and our aid agencies have to be safe. The UK and the international community also need to ensure that aid goes, when possible, to all parts of Afghanistan that are in need of support, not just those areas under Taliban control. I understand from Afghan constituents that the Taliban have effectively blocked off routes in and out of Panjshir province and the people there might need humanitarian support.

In Scotland, we need to ensure that all 32 local authorities are supported and empowered to take in Afghan families who are fleeing violence. I know that there will be much discussion about how much money the UK Government will provide to support our councils, and I do not want to get involved in that argument this afternoon. We should not forget, however, that the UK spent a reported £38 billion on its involvement in Afghanistan. Health, education, housing and wider community support come at a cost but, frankly, providing them is the right thing to do morally. How much support will the UK Government put up for them?

Together with those of the USA, the UK's promises of protecting human rights and supporting a free, open and democratic society in Afghanistan, where the rights of women, children and minorities are respected, have melted away dramatically and with alarming speed. Funding the humanitarian fallout to ensure that local authorities across Britain can play their part in supporting Afghanistan friends is the very least that the UK Government could do.

In Scotland, much of the co-ordination must be led by the Scottish Government and partner agencies. We have a proud record of integrating communities well. However, such integration does not happen by accident—it takes careful planning and preparation. I hope that Scotland's Afghan community will be involved in that planning and preparation as well as in the delivery of support.

I was pleased to hear that the cabinet secretary has already had a roundtable meeting with various public partners, as well as with community organisations such as Glasgow Afghan United. The strain placed on Glasgow Afghan United over the past few weeks has been immense. Often, the

volunteers supporting the wider community also have loved ones at risk in Afghanistan at this difficult time. Their workload has spiralled, but the practical and emotional support offered has been vital for many families. Such organisations will be vital in supporting the Afghan new Scots families who will settle here in Scotland. The integration networks such as the Maryhill Integration Network and the Scottish Refugee Council are also vital. I was pleased to hear about the fantastic and amazing job that the Scottish Refugee Council has already undertaken. We have to ensure that those organisations are not just part of support plans and preparations but are resourced to deliver that vital support on the ground. I am sure that the Scottish Government will take that seriously. We should not underestimate the emotional and mental support that is offered by such organisations.

I have not mentioned how many families the UK and Scotland should take. Needless to say, the current numbers are widely accepted to be grossly insufficient. However, when the UK Government looks at the numbers of Afghan families as well as the criteria for settling in the UK, it should look generously at humanitarian reasons to support family reunification for so many Scots Afghan families whose loved ones are in danger right now in Afghanistan. They are in great peril. Scots Afghans are worried sick about their brothers, sisters, fathers and wider families.

I stand in solidarity with my constituents who are Afghan and Afghan Scots today. As a Parliament, we should come together to do all that we can to help as many people as possible to make a new life in Scotland that is safe and free and in which they can realise the dreams and aspirations that have been so cruelly snatched from them in Afghanistan.

15:53

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has chosen to have an early debate on such an important subject. There have been some excellent and important speeches, including the previous one by Bob Doris.

Antiwar.com columnist, Daniel Larison, has said:

“Now that U.S. forces have finally exited Afghanistan, some American hawks are already agitating for the government to stoke internal conflict by backing a new insurgency and wage economic warfare on the country ... The US has previously responded to military defeat by inflicting economic punishment on the former enemy. The US trade embargo on Vietnam impaired the country's economic recovery and contributed to the mass exodus of refugees from the country beginning in the late 1970s.”

We already know that there is a significant refugee crisis in the wake of the US-led exit from Afghanistan. Inflicting collective punishment on a country will drive even more people to flee to other countries. The international approach must be to recognise that Afghanistan remains a poor country that remains heavily dependent on outside aid. Any disruption to the flow of that aid will have serious consequences.

Meanwhile, all of us in the Parliament are worried about the position of women and girls and LGBT people who are left under Taliban rule. As Sarah Boyack says, we must not forget them. It is a huge human rights crisis and a geopolitical nightmare in the region. We did not need the distraction of our Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, giving a dreadful performance yesterday when trying to answer questions on his role. Now, we must focus on what we can do.

Lisa Nandy has described the situation as

“The biggest foreign policy failing in a generation”.

The scenes from Kabul airport are shocking. The evacuation process from Afghanistan has been, and continues to be, at best, a shambles and, at worst, life threatening.

Warnings were given that there would be a bomb blast outside Kabul airport last week, but still, sadly, 92 people died. Their willingness to risk their lives to get to the airport demonstrates the desperation felt by many Afghans, who see no future for themselves under Taliban rule. Who can forget the footage of hundreds of people at Kabul airport running alongside a US Air Force plane as it gathered speed on the runway, with several men clinging on to the side? Harrowing videos posted on social media appeared to show two people falling to their deaths from the US aircraft after it took off. One was an Afghan teenager, Zaki Anwari—a 19-year-old footballer who played for the national youth football team. It is an absolute tragedy that his life was cut short in such appalling circumstances.

The shadow Home Secretary, Nick Thomas-Symonds, noted that

“The appalling mishandling of the collapse in Afghanistan by Conservative Ministers has left huge numbers of lives at risk and a potential humanitarian crisis”

and said that the lack of planning to get people out is totally unforgivable.

In the past week, the UK Government has announced that it will create safe routes for Afghans to come to the UK, and I whole-heartedly welcome that. However, we still do not know how those supposed safe routes will be opened up, and many people obviously fear for their lives in relation to being able to access those routes.

In the past fortnight, 15,000 Afghans have arrived in the UK, 8,000 of whom are former British Government employees. Those who were working for the UK Government were brought in under the Afghan relocations and assistance policy, so they will get indefinite rather than temporary leave to remain, and that is to be welcomed. However, as has been said, under the Nationality and Borders Bill and current immigration rules, Afghans who try to escape through what are obviously not safe routes on boats will be automatically refused and disqualified. It would be helpful for Conservative colleagues in particular to add their voices to highlight the seriousness of that, if we are serious about providing safe passage and refuge for Afghans who are trying to get out of the country.

It appears so far that those who were considered at risk have been flown out, but those who have not been working for the UK Government will have the usual long wait to have their applications considered, and they will not be able to work in the meantime. There is quite a lot to consider in terms of the immigration rules that will apply to people whom we want to help.

I want to raise some questions around the current Syrian refugee resettlement scheme, which the minister mentioned. It is great to hear that 18 councils have come forward, but in the past some councils have complained that financial support for the scheme has not been as good as it should be. I would like some reassurances on that, although I welcome the announcement of the emergency fund.

I share the view of the First Minister and the minister, Angus Robertson, that we in Scotland should make a big commitment to settle Afghan refugees. That would be humanitarian, and it is something that Scotland has done in the past. It would be helpful to have some clarity on the numbers that we hope to take. I appreciate that there is a debate over how many of the 5,000 refugees the Scottish Government hopes to take, and around the numbers that it would like to take beyond that, with regard to funding. We need financial support, as we can see that difficulties might otherwise arise.

Bob Doris talked eloquently about Glasgow, which has a fairly large Afghan community, and there will be a much bigger Afghan population around the country. Those Afghans who have settled in Scotland have been absolutely amazing in providing support, and it would be worth considering whether some of that money could go towards ensuring that they can give advice and support to people who come to Scotland, because they themselves know what it is like. It might be quite helpful to give them access to some funding as part of the whole programme.

15:58

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Afghanistan is at a pivotal point in its existence. In reality, very little progress towards a truly modern democratic society as we would recognise it has been made over the past 20 years. For example, under the first Taliban regime, 2.3 per cent of girls attended secondary school; by this year, the figure for girls was still only 13.2 per cent, and it was 37 per cent for boys. Views remain highly traditional, with 85 per cent of Afghans believing that adulterous women—not men—should be stoned to death, and 79 per cent supporting the death penalty for apostasy. It is not difficult, therefore, to see why the Taliban were able to secure the support of a sizeable chunk of Afghanistan's population in rural areas in particular.

The country was devastated by more than four decades of war, from the 1979 Soviet invasion onwards. The Soviets caused catastrophic damage to Afghan society, killing an estimated total of between 600,000 and 2 million people and destroying half the country's 24,000 villages, with a quarter of the population fleeing abroad. Nevertheless, after they left, following a costly guerrilla war by radicalised mujaheddin backed by the west, China and the Gulf states, the client state that was left in place still survived for a year longer than the Soviet Union itself. We can contrast that with the almost immediate collapse of the US-backed Afghan Government kleptocracy, which took place over a few days.

The relative calm in recent years, secured by the dedication and sacrifices of UK and US forces, and coalition forces from Canada to Croatia, masked rampant corruption, tribal patronage and predatory policing of elections. Billions of dollars in military and development aid were stolen, warlords were kept in place and a small privileged elite was in charge. Generals claimed the salaries of non-existent soldiers while failing to feed those who were actually under their command.

Such was the rush to leave Afghanistan that the US commander of Bagram air base neglected even to tell his Afghan counterpart that he was off. Shockingly, DNA and biometric data on those who worked for the US and its allies were left to the Taliban. Black Hawk helicopters, 22,000 Humvees and even Cessna ground-attack aircraft were abandoned, although without spare parts they will not last; they could perhaps be exchanged following negotiations as the west tries to limit growing Chinese influence.

Professor Michael Burleigh's book "Small Wars, Far Away Places: The Genesis of the Modern World 1945-65" exposes the shocking ineptitude of US post-war foreign policy, and that ineptitude continues more than half a century later. In 2019,

development and humanitarian aid, ranging from money invested in the economy, education, counterterrorism and narcotics control to disaster relief and refugee support, amounted to \$779 million in a country of 39 million. To put that in context, it is less than NHS Ayrshire and Arran's budget for that year to serve 367,000 people.

Most of the aid provided over two decades was in the form of military hardware and salaries. Altogether, foreign aid represented almost 78 per cent of Afghanistan's public expenditure in 2019. That money is now lost to a desperately poor economy, and three quarters of the population does not have enough to eat as winter approaches.

Humanitarian aid is of critical importance and should be provided directly to the people, without preconditions, if the Taliban permit it. Additional aid must be surely be dependent on how the Taliban treat women, girls and minorities, on whether they will allow some of Afghanistan's citizens to leave and on the country not becoming, once again, a haven for the launch of terrorist attacks.

The impact of the Taliban's renewed control of Afghanistan will reach far beyond Afghanistan's borders unless another issue that is of direct importance to Scotland and the west is addressed: opium. The Taliban claim that they will work to eradicate poppy cultivation, the practice of which was nearly eradicated two decades ago. However, should we believe the Taliban when an estimated three million people in Afghanistan are now employed in opium production and distribution? Three of the past four years have witnessed record opium production in Afghanistan, with cultivation soaring by 37 per cent last year. According to the United Nations 2021 world drug report, almost 93 per cent of villages in the country's southern region cultivate opium poppies, and all village leaders in Helmand reported opium poppy cultivation to the UN.

Cutting the seed pods of mature poppies pays at least twice as much as harvesting pistachios and significantly more than working in construction. Revenue from heroin and opium provides the Taliban with an estimated 60 per cent of their income, which is important for the Taliban to maintain—they may even want to expand that. In a country with 40 per cent unemployment, farmers living hand to mouth receive advance payments for growing poppies but not other crops. Can they be blamed for growing poppies, or does the problem lie with greed, international demand and a system that incentivises cultivating illegal crops?

There is money to be made from the 10 per cent cultivation tax that is collected from poppy farmers by the Taliban, and drug labs that produce heroin

are subjected to taxation, too, with estimates of the Taliban's annual income from that ranging up to US \$400 million. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimates that 90 per cent of the world's heroin and opium supply originates in Afghanistan, contributing 11 per cent to its gross domestic product.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint exact numbers, less open to dispute is where the Afghan heroin ends up. Here in Scotland, another 1,339 lives were lost to drug overdoses last year, many of which were down to heroin. The Scottish Government is working to tackle the problem in multiple ways. However, controlling a supply of heroin by tackling importation is extremely difficult. The National Crime Agency works with partners on every step of the trafficking route.

Although the Taliban regime is utterly reprehensible, it would be wrong to disregard the contribution of other actors to the thriving heroin industry. There is a reason why the production of opium and heroin was able to soar in the way that it did over the past 15 years while there was an Afghan Government in place that was not the Taliban. Corrupt Afghan Government officials not only allowed the trade to flourish over the years; they actively nurtured and benefited it, while cultivation seemed to go relatively unhindered by western forces. It is hard to believe that the Taliban will crack down, but that must be one of the demands made by the international community. The Taliban want to consolidate their regime, but dealing with them is a tough task, given their ideology and the fact that an even more fanatical fundamentalist force, Islamic State-Khorasan Province, is waiting in the wings should they appear too moderate to their own supporters.

Afghanistan faces a bleak future but, for its people and for the safety and security of our own, we cannot abandon it, and we must work with everyone we can to do our best for the people of Afghanistan.

16:05

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): The current crisis in Afghanistan is both overwhelming and multilayered, but I will begin by expressing my solidarity with all those who are suffering or who are trying to flee to safety, and my deepest sympathies go to those who have lost loved ones in this catastrophe.

More than 18 million people within the country are in need of humanitarian aid, their sufferings intensified both by the Covid pandemic and by climate change-induced droughts. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports that more than 550,000 Afghan people—more than half a million—have been

forced to flee their homes since the beginning of this year alone, adding to the 3 million who are already displaced inside Afghanistan and the 2.6 million refugees elsewhere, nearly 90 per cent of whom are in Pakistan and Iran.

The United Kingdom and its allies bear a great responsibility, not only to the Afghan people who have worked with our military forces, thereby placing themselves and their families at increased risk, but in relation to long-running harms and injustices endured by the entire Afghan nation. Afghanistan was the unwilling playground for the so-called great game of the 19th century that was callously played between the British and Russian empires. It was again exploited as a proxy for the cold war in the 1980s, when the US urged rebels to fight “to the last Afghan.” At the very beginning of our current century, its people experienced the arrogance and recklessness of Bush and Blair’s enthusiastic invasion and its tragic aftermath.

Clearly, the UK is complicit in the failed attempt at nation building in Afghanistan. We must stand up and recognise our role in creating this crisis and accept and act on our responsibility to Afghans fleeing conflict and persecution. The UK Government’s current commitment to take in 20,000 Afghans is pathetic. We must do more. As has already been discussed this afternoon, the UK Government’s cut to the aid budget means that we are failing in our duty to those in need around the world, and it is especially disgraceful when considering the reliance of those seeking refuge in refugee camps and elsewhere, and of those who are internally displaced, on foreign aid. I add my voice to the calls that have been made this afternoon to give those who are already in the UK indefinite leave to remain.

The invasion of Afghanistan, like the later war in Iraq, was part of the desperate neo-conservative search for a “good war,” in which the resources of the global south are seized for extractive capitalism, with the war dressed as promoting human rights. In Afghanistan, there was rhetoric about women’s rights—but more Afghan women and children have been killed and wounded during the first six months of 2021 than in any full year since records of civilian casualties began to be kept. That year, by the way, was 2009, eight years after the invasion. That indicates something of the way in which imperialists have disregarded the lives and wellbeing of the most vulnerable in Afghanistan. The US drone strike of just a few days ago, which was reported to have killed several young children, might well be another sign of that same contempt.

The Scottish people—those people who, this summer, stood in solidarity to prevent the deportation of their neighbours and friends—will recognise this as a matter not just of charity and

compassion but of justice. They will want us, as their representatives, to do everything we possibly can to support those in need, both those within Afghanistan and refugees. They will expect to see the international humanitarian fund used in this crisis, in order to be able to welcome Afghan refugees to their towns and cities and to support the work and expertise of civil society organisations. I thank the cabinet secretary for the announcement earlier this afternoon of £250,000 for the fund. I echo his remarks and those of Sarah Boyack and others about the role that civil society organisations and local authorities played during the Syrian resettlement scheme, and I know that they are ready to step up once again.

The Scottish people will want to see the Scottish Government using its moral influence not only to urge international co-operation on safe routes and humanitarian visas, but to bring about a discourse of respect and honesty. This crisis has shown us in stark and agonising clarity how desperately we need to make our own independent and humane immigration policy, as the direction in which the UK Government is plummeting can be nothing but a source of shame for us.

The Nationality and Borders Bill, which is currently at the committee stage in the House of Commons, is a direct and callous attack on the basic rights of refugees. If passed in its current form, it will place the UK in contravention of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, that historic treaty passed after the second world war, in which the global community looked back at the dispossessed and persecuted and said, “Never again.”

However, the Nationality and Borders Bill would criminalise genuine refugees who are unable to travel directly from their country of persecution, threatening them with four years in prison and seeking to remove them without even hearing their asylum claims. It would see more use of large-scale, hostel-type accommodation centres, the dangers of which we know only too well, refugees granted only short-term and precarious so-called “temporary protection” and enforced separation of parents and children—so much for the warm welcome that the UK is supposedly giving to refugees. Even the Law Society of England and Wales—scarcely a band of dangerous radicals—says that the bill would undermine both access to justice and the rule of law.

The Afghanistan catastrophe highlights, too, just how urgently Scotland, as a country that prides itself on its decent and progressive values, needs to make its own decisions on foreign policy and defence. In collective honesty and humility, we, as an independent country, could acknowledge our complicity in the injustices of the past and seek at least to begin to redress those wrongs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Ms Chapman, we are tight for time, so can you bring your remarks to a close? Thank you.

Maggie Chapman: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

We could work co-operatively with others, large and small, to address global problems and, crucially, we could resist being dragged into yet more military interventions, adventures from which wealthy corporations somehow inevitably profit while disposable children die.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now call Edward Mountain, who will join us remotely. He will be followed by Alasdair Allan.

16:12

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): It is right that the Scottish Parliament is debating Afghanistan. It should be a debate about what we need to do to help those who are struggling to come to terms with the actuality of what the withdrawal means and those who are in fear of their lives. What the debate should not be about is blandly criticising by saying that not enough is being done, especially as I believe that the world is still mobilising to respond to fast-moving events.

I have always had the greatest respect for those who have written a blank cheque for their commitment to their country. At the same time, I have held in total contempt those armchair generals who play petty playground politics with serious matters to justify their political aims. To me, gesture politics, as I am sure all real politicians will agree, should have no place in this Parliament or any Parliament. It is sad to me that some appear to be using that in the debate.

I believe that the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan was a huge mistake—one that we will all regret and one that the US must take responsibility for. Mr Cole-Hamilton and Ms Stewart should be under no illusion, because the US withdrawal forced the UK withdrawal. Without the US, our forces would have been swamped by the Taliban. In the coming months we will have to see whether it is possible for religious zealots to change the way in which they behave. Frankly, I doubt that they will. I believe that we will see the Taliban take murderous revenge on those who do not support their religious and nationalist idealism. Now, however, is the time to look to ours, those who have the courage to stand with us and those who need our help.

It is almost 20 years since we deployed forces in Afghanistan. Our servicemen and women and their families have been under constant strain; 457 of them have given their lives and more than 2,200

of them have been injured. Many of those who served out there will be asking what it was all for, and I have had those discussions with many ex-servicemen and women, including my son, who served in Afghanistan. The answer that I gave him and the others that I have spoken to is that our 20-year deployment gave hope to the oppressed and prevented Afghanistan from being used as a terrorist base. That is a huge achievement, which the UK should be proud of. No life that is lost in order to protect freedom is ever wasted, unless those who benefit from those freedoms forget the debt that they owe; I will not and we should not.

The UK Government has been leading the international response to the crisis. We called for emergency G7, NATO and UN Security Council meetings. We played our part in evacuating 15,000 civilians from Afghanistan, a number that includes 4,000 British passport holders and more than 8,000 Afghans who worked with the UK Government. I commend every one of the 1,000-plus troops, diplomats and officials who gave their all to ensure that all were evacuated who possibly could be.

However, let us be clear. The Taliban takeover threatens to destabilise the country with extremism and persecution. I welcome the fact that the UK is ready to stand up and continue to support Afghans who are getting out of Afghanistan and those who are arriving in our country. We should never forget that, since 1996, we have already taken in 36,000 Afghans and we will take at least another 25,000 more, over and above those who have already been evacuated.

Operation warm welcome, which was announced this week, promises to ensure that Afghans who resettle in the UK receive the vital support that they need to rebuild their lives, find work, pursue education and integrate into their local community. That is a significant package of support, which includes £12 million to provide additional school places, £3 million to access the national health service and up to 300 university scholarships. Let us not forget that the UK Government is also already committing £200 million to the Afghanistan citizens resettlement scheme.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to all those Afghans who worked alongside the UK and risked their lives in doing so. It is therefore only right that we now do everything we can to help resettle the Afghans, so that they can restart their lives and thrive within the UK.

The military withdrawal from Afghanistan was premature, and I believe that it was a massive mistake. We have much to do to ensure that those refugees who have escaped are provided with a safe place to live and that they become integrated within our community. We also need to ensure that

all those who are struggling to come to terms with the withdrawal from Afghanistan are fully supported. I make one final plea—we must not play party politics with the issue; those members who have done so are simply beyond my contempt.

16:18

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Other members today, not least Bob Doris beside me, have spoken very powerfully about the tragic situation in Afghanistan and Scotland's moral obligation to help some of those who are now fleeing for their lives. As we have heard, those people include many women and girls who have gone to school or done anything else to make them conspicuous in the eyes of their new Government. They also include all those who have assisted coalition forces in any way over the past 20 years.

It is for another day to offer assessments about the political decisions that led to such a rapid withdrawal of those forces. For the moment, suffice to say that history is unlikely to be kind. Lest Mr Mountain wilfully mistakes that as a criticism of our armed forces: it most certainly is not.

I want instead today to say something specifically about those who have worked for international development agencies in Afghanistan to give opportunities to women and girls. As some members will be aware, Linda Norgrove, from the Isle of Lewis in my constituency, devoted and ultimately gave her life to helping people in Afghanistan to rebuild their communities. Linda was kidnapped by the Taliban and died during a failed rescue attempt in 2010. To their great credit, Linda's parents, John and Lorna, now work from their home in Lewis to fund and facilitate projects that continue Linda's legacy of supporting women and families in Afghanistan.

Needless to say, since the Taliban captured Kabul on 15 August following a rapid advance across the country, the fate of all those working on those projects has been a cause of serious concern. Then, on 26 August, an explosion outside Kabul airport, caused by an ISIS-K suicide bomber, killed at least 170 people and injured a further 150. Amid all that chaos, the Linda Norgrove Foundation was attempting to evacuate two vulnerable female staff members and their families. Sadly, despite getting close several times over the course of a 46-hour ordeal, they did not manage to get on a plane before the military presence departed. The Linda Norgrove Foundation is now anxious to find a way out of the country for them in the days ahead. I would ask the UK Government to be aware of, and to act on, those concerns.

The charity also hopes to be able to bring 20 of its 70 female Afghan medical students to the UK to continue their studies. All five of Scotland's medical schools have, very creditably, already said that they would be happy to accept those students. The foundation has vowed to continue its work in Afghanistan to the best of its abilities under the new regime, despite the obvious difficulties.

Scotland can help more generally in the meantime in giving a welcome to people who have come here seeking refuge. Scotland has a long and proud history of opening our doors to refugees from all over the world. The UK Government has said that vulnerable Afghan citizens who were called forward by the Foreign Office but could not be evacuated will be guaranteed a place under the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme.

The UK Government has also committed to taking around 5,000 refugees from Afghanistan in the first year, and 20,000 over the coming years. As the Scottish Government has pointed out, those numbers are unlikely to be anything like adequate. Given the UK's involvement in Afghanistan for decades, it is not possible to claim that we have no responsibilities there.

If I may end as I began, on a local note from my constituency, I want to praise the work of the local authority and community there over recent years in welcoming Syrian refugees to the Western Isles. I know many of those families and can confirm that they have enriched island communities, both culturally and economically, and have made a success of their lives. One of their children recently won a class prize for Gaelic. I record my personal thanks to those families for making the Western Isles their home.

As the cabinet secretary has likewise indicated, I hope that we can now give that same heartfelt welcome, across Scotland, to refugees from Afghanistan. I believe that we owe that much not only to the families, but to everyone from Scotland who has tried to help over the past decades in Afghanistan, whether in our forces or, like Linda Norgrove, in the many agencies that have been committed to building a better future for the people of that country.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Katy Clark will be the final speaker in the open debate.

16:23

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I strongly welcome the Scottish Government calling this debate, as well as the powerful contributions from across the political spectrum in support of human rights and the people of Afghanistan. It is important that those issues remain centre stage, because that scrutiny in itself will help those who

are fighting for human rights in Afghanistan and put more pressure on the Taliban.

The situation in Afghanistan is bleak. As so many have said, we face a humanitarian and human rights crisis. Women, girls, human rights defenders and those who have helped the west are at great risk.

In the short time that I have, I will focus on what we need to learn from our experiences of the weakness and corruption of the Governments that have been in power in Afghanistan over the past 20 years and that have fallen so quickly to the Taliban. I will also focus on some of the issues that have been raised—for example, drugs—on how we should accept that Scotland and the UK now have to bear responsibility and relentlessly focus on how to give support to the people who are fleeing the Taliban, and on how refugees can be housed and welcomed in Scotland.

It would be wrong if I did not declare that I campaigned and marched against the western military intervention 20 years ago, as I suspect from their speeches a number of other members did, too. I was sceptical about the stated war aims and the arguments that were made at the time, particularly because of the history of failed interventions and occupations in Afghanistan. I feared that it would be a counterproductive war that was not the most effective way of combating terrorism and there was no clear exit strategy.

I understand that many people supported the invasion and that one of the reasons why was the plight of women and girls under the Taliban. However, it was clear that that was not the USA's motivation for the war, given the role that it had played in the 1970s and 1980s in funding the mujaheddin against a secular Government that had brought in free medical care, mass literacy programmes and unprecedented gains for women and girls. Of course, the problem was that that regime was backed by Soviet Union, which then invaded.

Over the past 20 years, 457 British service personnel have lost their lives in Afghanistan and many more have been injured, had limbs amputated and suffered psychologically. Many civilians, like Alasdair Allan's constituent Linda Norgrove, have also lost their lives. It is estimated that almost a quarter of a million people have lost their lives in the conflict, the majority of whom were, of course, Afghan.

Most politicians supported the invasion and the big political parties were all in favour of it. One of the things that needs to come out clearly today, from across the political divide, is that we have a responsibility and have to play our full role in assisting the people who are now fleeing the Taliban. We must robustly condemn the UK's

inadequate response. The international aid budget cuts are shameful. I hope that when the Conservatives sum up they will echo the demands that have been made from across the chamber.

However, we also have to look at what the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government and all levels of government are able to do. People who are working with refugees have told me that they are not confident that we will take even the promised 20,000, given that previous commitments in similar situations have not always been honoured. In reality, it is the Home Office that commissions and undertakes most of the resettlement work. In Scotland, it is the councils that bear that burden, but every level of government has to take responsibility.

I welcome the further financial commitment from the cabinet secretary, but ask that we consider what more we and the Scottish Government can do. My colleague Pauline McNeill asked what percentage of the refugees are due to be resettled here and how many we feel that Scotland is equipped to welcome. How many refugees can we bring here and what work has the Scottish Government done to work out how many refugees it would be possible to house across the Scottish council areas? What discussions are taking place about what more can be done to maximise the numbers to which Scotland is able to provide support?

We have to show solidarity and learn lessons from the past, but most of all we have to give practical help. We must keep speaking up on behalf of the people who are fighting for the kind of values that brought most of us into politics to be upheld in Afghanistan, so they know that they have our solidarity and that we will not forget them. The more that we do that, the more we will ensure that Afghanistan has a society that the people of Afghanistan support and one in which fundamental human rights, including the rights of women and girls, are respected.

16:30

Alex Cole-Hamilton: In an intervention on Kaukab Stewart, Angus Robertson asked Opposition parties to restate their commitment to allowing Afghans who are domiciled in this country to stay. Nobody should be repatriated to that country while it is under the Taliban. I am happy to restate that commitment on behalf of the Liberal Democrats.

When Harold Macmillan handed over the keys of 10 Downing Street to Alec Douglas-Home, he is reported to have said something like, "So long as you do not invade Afghanistan, my boy, you will be absolutely fine." Our Government and the

American Government have discovered the truth in those words the hard way.

Earlier, I started by talking of my Quakerism, from where my liberalism stems. I have always been deeply sceptical of any military action to further the interests of the British state. Like Katy Clark, who has just made an excellent speech, I struggled with the original invasion of Afghanistan, not out of any love of the Taliban but because I doubted the motives behind it and because military aggression of any kind repels me. However, the endgame has been one of those rare occasions on which the removal of armed forces has actively resulted in brutality and oppression, and I cannot reconcile myself with that.

In practical terms, the war in Afghanistan has ended, so the international community must now take responsibility for what comes next. That means offering safe passage and safe harbour to those who need it. It means being emphatic and clear about our willingness and capacity to let people find peace here. The people who clung to the planes leaving Kabul airport were not doing so out of choice. People do not run along the tarmac like that on a whim; they do it out of fear and terror. Leaving a home, culture, community and family in the most chaotic and uncertain of ways happens only when the alternative is much worse.

Afghanistan might now be reported to be the graveyard of empires once again but, for many people, it was their home. It is a place of rich history and culture and the people to go along with that. The world's first oil paintings came not from the great cities of Europe but from the caves of Afghanistan. It was also the birthplace of one of the world's oldest faiths, Zoroastrianism, which believes in the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Now, as a result of the catastrophic failures of diplomacy, intelligence and forward planning, the end of the war might somehow lead to even more bloodshed. If someone has been forced to flee their home to escape war and persecution, they should not be confronted with needless barriers in the pursuit of safety.

We should not be quibbling about numbers or questioning motives. Since the days of the Kindertransport, during world war 2, the UK has had a proud reputation for providing sanctuary to those in need. The UK is a nation of immigrants, and we should be proud that people who want to come to our country and work in our NHS are now part of our society.

The Conservatives have, however, been determined to drag that legacy through the mud by treating refugees and asylum seekers with hostility and contempt through the hostile environment policy. I am grateful to Donald Cameron for his remarks and his call to his colleagues at

Westminster to reinstate the 0.7 per cent aid budget.

This has been a powerful and very moving debate. I am very grateful for the support for our amendment and the kind words of Sarah Boyack, who was right to speak in granular detail about the role of local authorities. Kaukab Stewart offered a very helpful analysis of the structures that we need to put in place to provide support for those who are arriving as refugees. Pam Gosal gave a moving account of the plight of Afghan women and girls, and that image of women burning their degree certificates will stay with me.

Bob Doris spoke of his constituents' efforts to escape, and with a bit more time they might have made it out of there. However, many Afghans did not have that time because they were not given notice of the American departure.

Like many members in the Parliament, I was overjoyed by the election of Joe Biden to the US presidency. I hoped that he might end Trump's doctrine of isolationism. After all, America has maintained a mission in Korea for 70 years to prevent the sort of destabilisation that we are now seeing in Afghanistan. At the base of the statue of Liberty, there is an inscription that is often quoted in this Parliament. It comes from a poem by Emma Lazarus:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

It is imperative that the US now recognises the destabilisation that it has caused and throws open the doors of liberty to the Afghan people it has deserted.

Pauline McNeill gave a typically moving speech in which she identified personal stories of people whose lives had been cut short. Edward Mountain referenced my remarks. For the record, I recognise how fatally undermined the UK mission in Afghanistan was by the US withdrawal. No one could fail to have been moved by the emotion and anger that we have seen in countless interviews with former and current serving armed forces personnel. That strength of feeling was captured in a spellbinding speech in the House of Commons by Tom Tugendhat.

There have been many other excellent speeches in the debate, but my time is running short.

At heart and to our fingertips, Scottish Liberal Democrats are internationalists. We believe in championing the values of human rights, democracy and equality. Now, the international community must act together and use every diplomatic means possible to secure a safe route out of the country for those people who wish to

flee Afghanistan. Therefore, I urge members across the chamber to support my amendment.

16:36

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I congratulate the Scottish Government on organising a debate on this subject, and I welcome the cabinet secretary to his role.

After the powerful and emotional words of Pam Gosal, Kaukab Stewart and Bob Doris, I would like to offer a prayer for all the Afghan people who have lost their lives.

There can be no doubt that the past few days have been nothing short of a disaster. We have watched in utter horror the scenes of Afghans running after planes that were taking off or staying at an airport that they knew would be bombed, and of parents handing their babies to complete strangers from our armed forces, hoping for an escape from inhumanity. The real desperation has been truly hard to watch. Regardless of the past, we have a moral responsibility to do what we can and help those people, and we must. We cannot let the last 20 years' efforts go in vain.

At this point, I want to thank our armed forces for the work that they have done to airlift as many of our Afghan allies as possible—Afghans who put their own lives on the line, including the medics, interpreters and local security forces, some of whom helped to protect our embassy staff.

As my colleague Sarah Boyack rightly said, today must be about looking at our responsibilities to the people of Afghanistan after nearly 20 years of war. They are our friends and we should remember that we made a promise to them. They fear for their lives and are worried about what life will be like now for their families, their children and their friends.

On refugees, the UK Government must be bold and ambitious. The Tories claim to lead a new global Britain, but actions speak louder than words. It is time for action. The Government of that so-called global Britain has offered to allow only 5,000 refugees to settle down in our nation over the next five years, while our allies in Europe and across the world are doing all that they can to help to resettle larger numbers of people. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees currently estimates that 90 per cent of the 2.6 million Afghan refugees who are outside the country live in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan. We can do far more to play our part in supporting refugees.

I hope that we have a genuine settlement programme that can truly support the needs of the Afghans. We need to have a programme that will be ambitious and welcoming, because if we do

not, it will leave open the possibility that more vulnerable Afghans will be at risk of being at the mercy of human traffickers and those who seek only violence. I urge the UK Government to change direction. We are a welcoming, caring and compassionate nation. We could show real leadership.

We can show that leadership here, in Scotland. We must play our part at home. Groups in Edinburgh and across Scotland have been supporting refugees for years and stand ready to provide support to those coming from Afghanistan.

Sarah Boyack referred to the tremendous work that The Welcoming Association has done here, in our capital, to help those in need, supporting refugees to learn English, find jobs and access local services and offering opportunities for friendship, creativity, health and wellbeing. It connects locals and newcomers through social and cultural exchange, collaborating with others to share knowledge and skills and to influence positive changes. That is the kind of action that we need now.

However, we can do more only if we ensure that there is funding for local authorities to support anyone who seeks help. Refugees deserve to be treated with respect, not stuck in poor, inadequate, temporary accommodation. Many refugees are on waiting lists for comfortable safe homes where they can settle their families. Scotland can and must do better than it is doing now.

I join the calls for the Scottish Government to make the necessary financial commitment, not only by reversing the cuts that local authorities have faced in recent years but by ensuring that adequate funding is in place for new housing. That will help not only our existing communities but refugees newly arriving in Scotland, so that all can have the life and opportunities that they deserve. It is time for action, not rhetoric.

This capital city is truly a beacon of hope to me. I came here because I knew that this city would give my family a fresh start in life and take us in with welcoming arms. Let us ensure that anyone looking for a new start in life can begin that journey here, in Scotland. I hope that Parliament will support the Labour amendment.

16:42

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): This has been a compelling debate. It has been uncomfortable for me at times and I hope that it has been uncomfortable for everyone. None of us should feel that we have the moral high ground or that we lack personal responsibility for what we have been discussing. I can say to Foysoyl Choudhury that we will support the Labour amendment and I say to those who have asked

specific questions of the Conservatives that I will come to those in my summing up.

I begin with a couple of observations. Kenneth Gibson reminded us in a motion that he lodged today that, a week on Saturday, it will be 20 years since the events of 9/11 took place in New York. That was the catalyst for the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan. I remember that day, which I imagine all of us are old enough to remember. I felt a profound sense of shock not only at the events but at the realisation that the whole period of cold war foreign politics that I had grown up with, and which had been in a hiatus, had suddenly been replaced with a completely new form of politics and threat that was going to dominate events in the years ahead.

Some 58 nations supported the incursion into Afghanistan, which was at first intended to end the threat from al-Qa'ida and the use of Afghanistan as a base for international terrorism. We succeeded in that objective. I think many of us accept that the subsequent war in Iraq, whatever its merits—and that is a separate debate—diluted the effort had been made in Afghanistan. That war took the eyes of the international community and of the countries that had been part of the invasion of Afghanistan and its hoped-for rebuilding off the prize of a better Afghanistan in future.

Despite all the work that we did on education for women, which Pam Gosal and others touched on this afternoon, there came to be a growing realisation as time went on that the hopes of that first democratic election were not being fulfilled. The Government of Hamid Karzai, which sought to try to centralise Afghanistan around Kabul, was alienating many of those in the regional provinces and there was an emergence of an internal civil conflict, with which we then found it almost impossible to wrestle.

As we come to the most recent events, I think that the departure was a disgrace, and I look to the United States as the principal body of culpability. In two presidential elections in America, we have been presented with candidates who were either unfit for office, deeply polarising or unsuited to office. This is the first time in my lifetime that that has happened.

Whatever I felt about American Administrations—from Eisenhower in Korea; through Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon in Vietnam; Reagan in Grenada; Bush and an exemplary first incursion repelling the invasion of Kuwait; to Clinton and the Balkans; and subsequently Bush and Obama—I may have disagreed, but I thought that there was a basic level of competence. I do not see that today, and if people across the world think that America has given up on them, why should America expect them not to give up on it? I saw a headline in the Chinese communist national

newspaper saying that people in Taiwan should look to Afghanistan and see their future. That is deeply disturbing for us, as part of a NATO alliance that has relied inherently on the strength of the United States.

Of course, in Saigon, it collapsed in an ignominious fashion, although it did at least manage to dump the hardware in the sea rather than leaving it for those who were taking over. America did recover its authority after Vietnam, and we just have to hope, even as we stand here in some dismay, that that can yet happen again, because America has to be a crucial part of our international western response to events.

At the moment, it seems that there is a lot of wishful thinking abroad that the Taliban will be different, but the early signs are not encouraging. Women have been expelled from university in Herat and told that they can no longer work, and huge numbers of people have been summarily executed, yet there are those in the Overseas Development Institute in London and in UNICEF who say that there are grounds for optimism.

A real subject for international debate—we have not touched on it in this debate—may yet be what happens if the Taliban do not deliver. Do we simply then withhold all aid and support from the people of Afghanistan as a penalty for its imposed Government, or do we recognise that we still have a moral responsibility to the people of Afghanistan, notwithstanding the actions of the subsequent Government? We need to touch on that.

There have been some compelling contributions to the debate. I listened to Bob Doris, Katy Clark, Foysool Choudhury and Pam Gosal, who all talked with passion about the people of Afghanistan and our responsibility, and I hope that we accept that it is a collective responsibility. Let us not find ways together to be cynical and undermine the challenge that is now before us. We are an excellent country at welcoming and incorporating people into the United Kingdom, and in operation warm welcome we should be willing to succeed and not find excuses and reasons to hope that we will fail.

I will not get into the numbers debate, but two questions have been asked of us this afternoon and I want to be clear that the commitment from the UK Government—I think that I saw an exchange between the cabinet secretary and others on this—is that

“Relevant Afghan citizens ... already in the UK with limited leave can apply for indefinite leave to remain at any time, despite the Immigration Rules currently stating they must have competed at least 5 years with limited leave before they are eligible”.

The criteria are that they have worked for the UK, they are at risk of death, which is a pretty

comprehensive provision in the current circumstances, or that they are otherwise eligible as set out in the relocations and assistance scheme. I do not feel confident to go beyond that today, but I am prepared to work with the Scottish Government to bottom out what that commitment actually represents.

Secondly, we have been asked about our commitment to international aid. I and my predecessor were absolutely clear that we did not agree with the UK Government's decision to reduce the international aid budget, although we understood the economic circumstances of the moment, and I have called for and will continue to call for its earliest possible restoration. However, I point out that the aid budget is not a cash sum, it is a percentage of GDP. That requires a strong and growing economy. There is not much point in willing a bigger percentage if one is not also going to will a stronger and bigger economy at the same time. The amount of aid that we are able to give, whatever the percentage, depends on the strength of our economy as a country, but we are saying in our amendment that we want to see that percentage restored.

I recognise that my time is up. I will finish by saying that collectively, as a chamber, a country and a people, we owe one heck of a debt to all the people who helped us in Afghanistan and the people of Afghanistan whom we sought to help, and we must honour that in full.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jenny Gilruth to wind up the debate for the Scottish Government.

16:50

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth): I thank all members who have taken part in the debate. As Jackson Carlaw noted, the speeches have shown powerful compassion for the lives and livelihoods of the people of Afghanistan, and I thank every member who has contributed.

Members have told the stories of the people affected by the US-led military withdrawal and, across party lines, members have demonstrated the willingness of this Parliament to step up. As we know, the return and resurgence of the Taliban has stirred fear in many, not least Afghanistan's women. The reign of the Taliban from 1996 to 2001 was one in which women and minorities lived in absolute and all-encompassing terror. Women were confined to their homes unless accompanied by a man; women were refused an education; women were banned from working.

The Taliban now say that they will respect women, almost as though they have attended a public relations course on how to appear

reasonable. We must not forget that it is a violent regime that does not recognise human rights. I share Edward Mountain's cynicism that the Taliban are really seeking to change at all. Indeed, yesterday, in response to a question on whether women would form part of the proposed Taliban regime, a senior Taliban official stated that members would be selected on merit—specifically, those with capacity for posts would be selected. The implication was that women have neither.

Misogyny knows no borders and it does Afghan women a real disservice to suggest that we in the UK or in Scotland have all the answers. We should be cognisant of the politics at play. As Talat Yaqoob wrote earlier this week,

"We are in yet another crisis where Muslim women are used as tools to deflect from foreign policy disasters and domestic political fall-outs, all without nuance and all too often, without hearing from the women being pointed at, written about or photographed, crying in fear."

We must commit to actively listen to the voices of the women, who, as Talat notes, were frozen out entirely from the negotiations on the military withdrawal.

As members know, earlier this week, the cabinet secretary and I met members of the Afghan community in Scotland. Safia Khalid, who works for Glasgow Afghan United, which Bob Doris referenced, made some practical points that I want to share with members. She spoke of the need for Afghan women to be trained to understand the rights that they have in Scotland; the need for them to be shown where they can shop, how they can travel and the importance of making sure that they do not feel lonely; and the importance of access to English classes, with wrap-around childcare provision, because of the reality that, for many Afghan women, only their husbands will understand English. I want to give Safia a commitment that officials are undertaking urgent work on that matter.

I turn to some of the points that members raised in the debate. Donald Cameron opened by speaking of the importance of our armed services and paid tribute to those who fought to bring democracy to Afghanistan, and I want to share that sentiment from members on the Government benches and join him in that.

Sarah Boyack, Maggie Chapman and Katy Clark derided the UK Government's overseas aid cuts. I hope that members know that they have the support of the Scottish Government on that matter. It should not have happened and it should not have happened in the midst of a global pandemic.

Alex Cole-Hamilton spoke of the violence of the Taliban regime. I will not repeat what he said, but it was particularly vivid and demonstrated the sheer brutality of the Taliban in action.

I am glad to hear that members, such as Kaukab Stewart and Bob Doris, are speaking to Afghans in their community, which I think is hugely important. The fear that Afghans must be living with at this moment in time must be unbelievable.

On Alasdair Allan's point regarding the Linda Norgrove Foundation, I give an assurance that the Scottish Government will help with those representations to the UK Government in any way that we are able to.

I thank Pam Gosal for her extremely powerful contribution. She spoke about a "lost generation" of women and girls, and about the haunting images that we all recall of Afghans desperately fleeing for safety. Pauline McNeill touched on that, too. Ms Gosal said that

"the daughters of Afghanistan will be punished by the Taliban—make no mistake about that."

I fear that she is absolutely correct.

Bob Doris spoke about the importance of planning and preparation, and he can be assured that the Afghan community will be and are already involved in the preparatory work that he spoke to.

Katy Clark asked a number of specific questions, which I want to address briefly. We do not yet have details about the total number from the UK Government, but I can give Ms Clark an assurance that we will share those details when we have them. On the specifics regarding work with councils, as I mentioned, the cabinet secretary and I met representatives from COSLA earlier this week, and we are due to meet them again soon. Local authorities have been undertaking preparatory work since June, and the cabinet secretary gave an update about the current numbers in his opening remarks. However, we will keep members updated on that as the situation evolves. I hope that members appreciate and understand that things are moving quickly at the moment.

The UK has a duty to help the people of Afghanistan, not least because of our historical involvement in three different Anglo-Afghan wars between 1838 and 1919. The United Kingdom was also at the centre of the intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, and it must be at the centre of the solution to the current crisis. As the chamber knows, the UK Government's Afghan citizens resettlement scheme offers to take just 20,000 people over five years, with 5,000 people in the first year. That is not enough. According to the House of Commons library, the UK accepted around 27,000 Asian-Ugandans in 1972 and between 17,000 and 22,500 Vietnamese refugees between 1979 and 1992. Resettled people are granted refugee status by the UK while abroad. They are then brought to live in the UK and their status is decided by officials from the UN and the

UK Government, so the UK Government will choose who is offered resettlement in the UK. The Prime Minister has written to the First Minister on the matter, and he can be assured of Scotland's support, but the resettlement scheme must do more for the people of Afghanistan. It must commit to take more Afghan refugees, and we in Scotland stand ready and willing to help in that endeavour.

We have heard today of Scotland's commitment to supporting the people of Afghanistan and I will touch briefly on my constituency. As a Fife MSP, I am really proud that Fife Council is one of the councils that have been willing to step up to the task at hand. Fife Council has coordinated its efforts with Fife Voluntary Action, which is actively collecting donations at its offices in Glenrothes and Kirkcaldy. I put on record my sincere thanks to the 18 council areas that have pledged their support additionally. As Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development, I was pleased that the humanitarian emergency fund could be activated to provide support for humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan. Maggie Chapman can be assured that that funding will be used to get to those who need it most in Afghanistan.

Members who were here last session will recall that we reviewed our international development offer earlier this year and that, following the election, the SNP would increase its international development budget by a third. However, the UK Government's decision to cut overseas aid during the worst excesses of the pandemic was nothing short of deplorable or, to quote the Baroness of Lundin Links, a "disgrace". Now is the time for the UK Government to recommit to the 0.7 per cent target, which should never have been reneged upon.

As Pauline McNeill told us, many threw themselves fatally at the side of aeroplanes, so desperate were they to escape. Thousands of people risked their lives to cross Kabul just to reach the airport. They faced Taliban checkpoints where there were so-called kill lists and bribes. For those fortunate enough to have the money to pay the bribe or not to be on a kill list, their fight for a better life did not end there. We all saw the images of people desperately trying to get on to those aeroplanes; so many were not lucky enough to make it. No one should ever have to make the choices that they face now.

I watched the Rory Stewart documentary "The Great Game" last night—so named after the way in which the British and the Russian empire treated Afghanistan in the 19th century—but Afghanistan is no game. As Afghan author Khaled Hosseini notes in his book "The Kite Runner",

"there are a lot of children in Afghanistan, but little childhood."

Today, we remember the lives of those who have been killed over the past 20 years—the children, men and women, civilians and those from our armed forces who we sent to Afghanistan in good faith. To the Afghan refugees who fled in terror: you will always be welcome in Scotland. This Government and this Parliament stand ready to assist.

Decision Time

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first is that amendment S6M-01003.2, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01003, in the name of Angus Robertson, on supporting the people of Afghanistan, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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

16:59

Meeting suspended.

17:03

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: Members should cast their votes now on amendment S6M-01003.2, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01003, in the name of Angus Robertson, on supporting the people of Afghanistan.

The vote is closed.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)

Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The result of the division on amendment S6M-01003.2, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01003, in the name of Angus Robertson, on supporting the people of Afghanistan, is: For 29, Against 93, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-010031.3, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01003, in the name of Angus Robertson, on supporting the people of Afghanistan, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-01003.1, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01003, in the name of Angus Robertson, on supporting the people of Afghanistan, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer, my app did not resurrect itself and I was unable to register my vote. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will record your vote, Ms Thomson.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer, the app has not taken my vote. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)

(SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Doney, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-01003.1, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01003, in the name of Angus Robertson, on supporting the people of Afghanistan, is: For 93, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-01003, in the name of Angus Robertson, on supporting the people of Afghanistan, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-01003, in the name of Angus Robertson, on supporting the people of

Afghanistan, as amended, is: For 93, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

Meeting closed at 17:12.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament records its alarm at the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Afghanistan following the return of the Taliban; further records its deep concern about the threat to life, liberty, equality, and human rights to all in Afghanistan and, in particular, for women and girls and minority communities; commends the Armed Forces, service personnel, and humanitarian agencies involved in supporting people during the evacuation; notes the UK's long history of involvement with, and intervention in, Afghanistan, and, in consequence, the obligation that the UK has to assist and support all those who are at risk of persecution or mistreatment as a result of the current crisis; recognises the lead role internationally that the UK Government must play in ensuring that aid continues to reach those who need it most and condemns the reduction in international aid by the UK Government from 0.7% of Gross National Income to 0.5%; urges the UK Government to ensure that those Afghans who have worked to provide critical aid assistance, uphold democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Afghanistan, can be allowed to settle in the UK alongside those who are at risk of violence and persecution as outlined in the UN Refugee Convention; recognises that Scotland has a duty to play a full role in assisting the resettlement and relocation of Afghans at risk and providing humanitarian assistance, and that anyone settling in Scotland will be welcome members of the community; recognises the importance of Scottish local authorities, community organisations and individual citizens in helping ensure a successful transition for every refugee; urges the UK Government to expand urgently its plans for the resettlement of 20,000 Afghan refugees, with a new plan to provide immediate sanctuary to people fleeing persecution, oppression and terror, instead of spreading assistance over five years; believes that the resettlement of 20,000 people should be the starting point instead of the final target, and urges the Scottish Government, in light of the immediate human need, to share proactively evidence of the number that it can resettle and provide effective support and services to, including the capacity to provide physical and mental healthcare, housing, guardians, translators and education, providing guarantees that the Scottish Government and public authorities across Scotland are ready to assist, in order to help persuade the UK Government to lift the overall cap and enable Scotland to provide sanctuary to thousands.

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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