

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 16 September 1999

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## Scottish Parliament

*Thursday 16 September 1999*

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:31*]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I ask you to accept without notice motion S1M-00158 relating to Continental Tyres. That motion is available in the chamber office and at the back of this room. The motion says:

That the Parliament calls upon the Scottish Executive to take up with the Continental Tyre Company the need to give their Scottish employees parity of treatment by offering them an equivalent package to that offered to and received by their former employees in Semprit in Ireland, in view of the impending visit on Friday to Newbridge of Dr Holzbach, senior executive member of the Continental Tyre Company.

I submit that this matter is urgent as last-minute negotiations between the work force and management will take place tomorrow. In view of the fact that 40 per cent less is being offered to the employees in Scotland than was offered to employees in Ireland, I submit that it is right and appropriate that the Parliament should be enabled to express a view.

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Under standing orders 8.2.6 and 5.5.4, I am prepared to accept motion S1M-00158. If the Parliament decides to allow a debate on the motion without notice, it will have to take place at 12 o'clock today, which means that the non-Executive business that is set down today will have to be cut short. It is entirely for the chamber to decide whether it will take this motion.

The question is, that motion S1M-00158 be taken at this meeting of the Parliament. Are we all agreed?

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The debate on motion S1M-00158 will take place at 12 o'clock. I ask the business managers to consider the lists of names that have been submitted for the transport debate, as it will not be possible now for all to be called.

## Non-Executive Business: Transport

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** We now move to the main business this morning, which is the non-Executive business debate on motion S1M-151, in the name of Murray Tosh, on transport and on an amendment to that motion. I call Murray Tosh to move the motion.

09:34

**Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con):** In the past year or so, transport has leapt to the top of the country's political agenda. One would not necessarily conclude that by looking at the somewhat sparsely filled seats, but I am sure that we will have a lively debate as a number of issues have arisen in the past year to concentrate our minds on a matter that is of great importance to our country.

There is the on-going story of the fuel escalator, which has reached such a level that it is beginning to cripple our haulage industry, and is damaging many parts of our country and, in particular, rural areas. There are the Government's proposals for new taxes and charges on motorists. There is the issue of the strategic roads programme, which this Parliament has discussed and on which the minister is due to make an announcement in the next few weeks.

It is right that we should discuss those issues in a Scottish context. It is proper that we should consider the issue of congestion in our cities and at the various pinchpoints along our major arterial routes, as it causes us such difficulty. It is desirable that we should discuss the possibilities of promoting modal shifts; we should encourage bus use, and, as far as possible, a move from road to rail.

It is highly desirable that this Parliament should consider air quality and vehicle emissions. I make it very clear that we agree with the Scottish Executive and the Minister for Transport and the Environment about the importance of continuing to examine those issues. This country has a record of attempting to tackle greenhouse gases and to reduce pollutants in the atmosphere. There must be no remission in that work. We accept that in that exercise there is scope for differential fuel duties, as have been imposed in the past, to encourage the use of fuels that are more environmentally acceptable.

We accept that there is every justification for tight regulation on vehicle efficiency—on fuel emissions—and that part of the strategy to combat polluted air, particularly in our cities, is better traffic management. We are happy to support the

Executive in positive initiatives such as that to switch freight from road to rail.

However, we also recognise that promoting bus and rail use can do only so much to absorb the inevitable and on-going growth in transport, and that, whatever is achieved in this field, roads will continue to be at the heart of our strategic transport system: roads for freight, and for commuters and other private motorists.

Road haulage demands good roads. It is vital to our industrial competitiveness that the cries of business are attended to, and that we do something to relieve the congestion that threatens the Scottish economy. It is important that we continue to make it possible for people to commute to work. It is the experience of so many of our countrymen and women that commuting is the only option to access work.

We agree with the recent warning from Professor David Begg—whose name does not necessarily spring first from a Conservative spokesman's lips when discussing transport issues—that there is a danger that the Scottish Executive is swinging the pendulum too far away from roads.

**Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** How does that argument square with the Conservatives' cuts in the roads budget from £247 million to £162 million, and with their reductions in grants to local authorities to absolute zero? How does that fit with Mr Tosh's argument about business, and the Confederation of British Industry and its comments?

**Mr Tosh:** If Mr Kerr looks at the figures for road construction under the Conservative Government, he will find that, at 1999 prices, the Conservative Government managed to spend £251 million on roads in 1996, and that a high proportion of that was spent on construction and upgrading of road networks. Under the current proposals, by 2002 expenditure on roads will have fallen in real terms to about £170 million. There are on-going cuts in local authority commitments as well, and there is almost nothing—only £14 million—in the budget for new road construction.

That is precisely what we mean in saying that the pendulum has swung too far, and why we can agree with what Professor Begg said in an informal briefing to the Transport and the Environment Committee. He said that it cannot be right that we have no new road building at all.

Roads matter. We cannot simply wipe out the road building programme. Professor Begg identified the importance of bypasses, and road improvements to promote road safety. He also urged us to consider carefully economic development. Almost every member can relate to that. We all come from regions, constituencies and

council areas that regard infrastructure as the key to their vitality, prosperity and development. With the best will in the world, and with even the most optimistic expectations about bus and rail transport, we will continue to need roads and must provide for good roads.

I have already touched on the spending reductions that have taken place in the past few years; more worrying are the projected reductions. When the minister makes her announcement on the strategic roads programme in a few days, we are afraid that she will have nothing to announce. She may be able to reorder the programme or to delete some projects, but should any strategic roads programme remain, there will be no resources to fund it. That should be a matter of deep concern to the Parliament.

We need to know what the Executive thinks about those issues and what importance it attaches to our industrial competitiveness and to economic development, particularly in our more peripheral areas. What is the Government's big picture? Over the past decade, it has been a central objective of European and UK policy to improve our strategic transport arteries. Surely, as a United Kingdom economy and as part of a growing and dynamic European economy, that should be the big picture. The improvement of strategic transport arteries includes roads, which is why the previous Government put so much into the M74. That is why the Government must—at a minimum—complete the essential, integral core motorway network, as well as considering road safety issues.

We believe that rail, sea and air routes are important too. We are happy to discuss the improvements to rail transport. We are conscious of the investment programme that ScotRail and the franchise operators are undertaking. We were heartened by the minister's visit to the Transport and the Environment Committee, in which she almost purred with delight at the prospect of all the new rolling stock that will be introduced by 2000. We welcome that development and hail it as a result of the privatisation regime and the substantial increases—£27 billion in the UK and £2 billion in Scotland—in investment that have been made by Railtrack. We are delighted that the Scottish Executive applauds and welcomes the fruits of that decision.

We have heard tolls and city entry charges being justified on the basis of tackling congestion and pollution. We are also aware of research and advice that suggests that if tolls were to achieve a substantial modal switch, they would need to be set at levels that we would all regard as prohibitive. Instead of tolls, we believe that we should improve traffic management, rail networks and bus operations in cities. We should not tax the

motorist off the street; that policy will not work, and so will have no impact on environmental pollution. The problem demands more carrot than stick.

At the end of the day, the bulk of the traffic in our cities will still be there. The approach should be one of management, containment and balance. We simply do not see a place for tolls.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** Is Mr Tosh saying that the Conservatives are against the principle of tolling or just against the practice of tolling?

**Mr Tosh:** In the current climate, we are against the principle of tolling. The Government is attacking the motorist from every conceivable direction by means of the fuel escalator and the proposals for motorway tolls and city entry charges. If the press are correct in their interpretation of the minister's recent comments, there may be a proposal that strategic routes will be approved only on the basis of private finance initiatives, which are in turn backed by tolls.

It appears that there is no intention of doing anything to repay motorists for the huge amounts of money that they pay into the exchequer.

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Mr Tosh:** Not in the middle of a point, thank you.

The Government and the Executive are jointly in the middle of a take, take exercise. I will acknowledge the fact that survey evidence suggests that motorists might be prepared to pay more. The Royal Automobile Club and the Automobile Association—even the CBI—have said that they are prepared to accept some charges. That is not our position, but those organisations think that motorists might be persuaded, if there were transparency and a commitment to spend the money in a way that will benefit those who are being charged.

Transparency and accountability have gone haywire. We began with a consultation scheme, which, when it was announced, did not even promise to ring-fence the money that was raised by tolls. Within a day, the Government backtracked on that and claimed that that was not its intention, but we still do not have any commitment on additionality. We still have not been promised that any moneys raised by tolls or city entry charges will be absolutely and categorically additional to the funds of the local authorities that receive them. As Andy Kerr has said, local authority expenditure on roads has fallen.

**Mr Kerr:** That was your party.

**Mr Tosh:** Andy should examine the current year and the projections for the next few years before

interrupting me again.

Nobody has been prepared to say that toll money will be additional or that motorists will gain from it. I am not belittling the importance of investing in our railway infrastructure, because, if members will forgive the expression, we have set in train an important programme of investment. In order for any policy to win public acceptance, there must be a promise that some proportion of the money will go towards roads expenditure. That commitment has not been given. There is no commitment from the Government to do any significant work on our major arterial routes. That cannot be right and will not be accepted. If that is really the Executive's point of view, it will find itself in severe political difficulty.

I am moving on to develop the next two points of the motion.

**Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** Will Mr Tosh give way?

**Mr Tosh:** No, I have given way twice. I am willing to give way on another matter, later on, if Sir David will indulge me.

The Conservative party recognises that not all the issues raised in my motion are matters for the Scottish Parliament or the Executive. I want to make a general point before going on to develop the more specific ones.

At various stages over the past few months, many members have asked ministers what they are saying to Westminster and what representations are being made about air, transport, fuel and a variety of matters that are reserved or in which responsibilities are shared. The only answer that we get to any of those questions is that ministers are meeting regularly with their UK counterparts and are raising a variety of issues. There is not a lot of transparency in that approach.

If devolution is going to work and if the Parliament is to convince the people of Scotland that it is meaningful and a success, we need more openness from the ministers in the Scottish Executive about the way in which they represent the Parliament and the country at a UK level.

There are two clear areas in which the Scottish Executive must send a message on transport, one of which is fuel duty. Inevitably, we will be attacked about the fuel escalator—we started it. However, we did not impose the fuel escalator at 6 per cent a year.

**Tavish Scott:** It was 5 per cent.

**Mr Tosh:** We were not committed to continuing it to 2002.

Above all, we are realists. If members consider the differential fuel price between this country and

our European competitors in 1996-97, they will find that we were not significantly out of line. However, if members examine the differential this year, they will find that we are out of line, and the projections for 2002 show that we will be enormously out of line.

One would have to be deaf not to hear what our road haulage industry is saying. One would have to be unfeeling not to have a twinge of concern about the impact of fuel prices on our rural areas. We must acknowledge that there is a strong feeling that we have reached the stage at which the escalator has gone too far. It is time to get our fuel prices back in line with those of our competitors. There are serious implications for our economy if we do not do that.

We are not saying that we should never again increase fuel duty, nor are we saying that the proceeds from fuel duty should be spent on transport. That was never our policy. When we were in government in Westminster, we raised money from fuel for health and education and other areas of Government expenditure. There is a judgment to be made about when that has gone too far. There is an enormous body of opinion—in Scotland and in those areas that are affected most starkly by those issues—that the Government and the UK have gone too far. It is time that the Executive reflected that opinion back to Westminster.

We also believe that there is a national problem of under-expenditure on transport. We trust that the large sum of money that the Chancellor managed to underspend by last year and the extra taxation that he is taking this year are not being retained for electoral purposes. We think that there is scope and justification for increasing UK expenditure on transport, with a consequent impact on Scotland.

**Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Mr Tosh:** No, I am sorry, Mr Morgan. I intended to give way, but Sir David is indicating that I have to wind up. I have already taken two interventions, as well as Mr Kerr's second, unofficial, one.

The Conservative party is concerned that the Government is embarking on a policy that consists largely of attacking the motorist. We think that the balance of the policy is wrong. There needs to be more commitment to our major arterial routes, and there needs to be a more balanced approach to fuel policy. Indeed, the Government's policies are out of balance in a number of areas.

We agree that there is much work to be done on transport, and that pollution problems in our cities must be tackled. However, the Government has not communicated its view of where the strategic transport network fits in with our economy, and

where roads fit into that strategic transport network.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the increased profile that has been given to transport issues and the Scottish Executive's commitment to continue reducing vehicle emission levels; recognises the importance of Scotland's transport links by road, rail, sea and air to our markets in the rest of the UK, the European Union and beyond; expresses concern that the Scottish Executive does not attach sufficient importance to the strategic road network, and calls upon the Scottish Executive to—

(a) increase the current level of spending on construction and maintenance of the trunk road network as part of the strategic roads review;

(b) withdraw the proposals to levy new tolls and taxes on motorists and other road users;

(c) initiate urgent talks with Her Majesty's Government with a view to increasing the share of the UK budget devoted to transport to allow strategic road and rail investment to proceed so that Scotland's needs are reflected in policies pursued at a UK level, and

(d) urge Her Majesty's Government to review the level of fuel taxes and vehicle excise duties.

09:51

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** I am grateful to the Conservative Opposition for this opportunity to debate the future of transport in Scotland and to highlight the depth of confusion and doublethink to which Conservative transport policies have sunk. I commend the Conservatives for their bravery in raising this issue.

Scotland's motorists and public transport users deserve a realistic and honest debate; we have seen little of that in recent months. We heard some fine words from our colleague Mr Tosh. He tried to portray himself as the motorist's friend and the defender of the car driver. But what do his words really add up to? From 1979 to 1997, the Conservatives had their chance to show their concern for Scotland's travelling public, and what did they do? They cut spending on motorways and trunk roads from £247 million in 1994-95 to £162 million in 1997-98. They pressed ahead with an over-ambitious road building programme without providing the money to back it up, leaving the roads network to deteriorate. Hardly the motorist's friend.

What about public transport?

**Mr Tosh** *rose*—

**Sarah Boyack:** Does Mr Tosh wish to intervene on the issue of public transport?

**Mr Tosh:** The minister asked what the Conservative Government had done. The answer is the M74, the M77, the St James interchange next to Glasgow airport, the Edinburgh city bypass

and major improvements to the A9. We did a great deal to improve the strategic transport network. That work was not finished—we expect the Government to finish it.

**Sarah Boyack:** The Conservative Government left us a legacy of an over-ambitious programme, in Scotland and in the United Kingdom as a whole. We are the Government that now has to work out how to fund that programme and how to prioritise the various schemes within it. Our answers will be clear when I present the strategic roads review to Parliament.

**Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**Sarah Boyack:** Not at this point, Kenny.

What about public transport? We heard a little from Mr Tosh about how public transport cannot meet our balanced transport objectives. I will take no lectures from the Conservatives about public transport. In one memorable year, 1996-97, they reduced central Government grants to local authorities for transport investment to zero. Yes, zero. In other words, no money for local roads, no public transport fund, no rural transport fund and no community transport fund.

What about the Conservatives' car-friendly policies? As Mr Tosh rightly anticipated, I would like to remind Parliament that the Conservative Government introduced the fuel duty escalator in 1993 and increased it from 3 to 5 per cent. According to a certain Ken Clarke:

"Any critic of the Government's tax plans who claims to also support the international agreement to curb carbon dioxide emissions will be sailing dangerously close to hypocrisy."

Only yesterday, Michael Meacher reinforced that point when he said that we would need to review the programme in 2002.

Who, I wonder, published "Paying for Better Motorways", as far back as May 1993? Whose Scottish transport policy statement in February 1997 canvassed the possibility of

"a better use of price signals to influence the demand and supply of road space"?

That is an interesting proposal. The prose is somewhat confused, but the meaning is clear—charge the motorist. Who said those things?

**Mr Tosh rose—**

**Sarah Boyack:** Perhaps Mr Tosh could enlighten us.

**Mr Tosh:** The previous Conservative Government did not propose tolling on any existing route or on any upgrade. It introduced powers—which are currently being used in Birmingham, for the first time, I think, since they

were used for the Skye bridge—to construct a totally new road under a private finance initiative backed by tolls. We did not at any stage countenance or propose that we should impose tolls on existing motorways or on trunk roads that had been upgraded to motorway status. That was not in our election manifesto in 1997.

**Sarah Boyack:** I quoted from "Paying for Better Motorways", which does not talk exclusively about new roads. The Conservatives think that it is important that we discuss this issue in what they call the right climate. When will we reach that right climate?

We did not hear a lot from Mr Tosh about Tory plans for the future. We have to move further south for those—to John Redwood. People say a lot of things about John Redwood, but he is the Tory transport spokesman.

**David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con):** On a point of order. John Redwood is not the transport spokesman for the Conservatives; Mr Tosh is.

**The Presiding Officer:** That is not a point of order, although it may be a point of information.

**Sarah Boyack:** In the absence of any practical proposals from Mr Tosh, we have to look to the Tories' 10-point plan for the motorist. John Redwood's proposals are for minimum speed limits, whereas our discussions in constituencies tell us that local communities are calling for appropriate lower speeds, not higher speeds.

Mr Redwood also proposes a mix of tax reductions and spending increases on roads, without any explanation of how the bill can be met. That is wholly implausible, and nothing has been added this morning to provide clarity.

I want to be fair to Mr Tosh's motion. He recognises the importance of reducing vehicle emissions. However, why is there no meaningful mention of public transport? He dismissed it out of hand, saying that it would have virtually no useful role to play in tackling emissions and congestion.

**Mr Tosh rose—**

**Sarah Boyack:** No, I will not give way. I have taken a number of interventions already, and I would like to get on.

The difference between the Government and our opponents is that we are prepared to look honestly and constructively at Scotland's transport problems, and to consider what needs to be done to provide solutions.

I would like to outline the Executive's agenda for action, explaining how we propose to tackle the Conservatives' legacy of inaction in transport. Our programme for government commits us to delivering an integrated transport policy that will provide genuine choice in meeting our transport,

social and economic needs, while protecting the environment as well.

**Mr MacAskill** *rose*—

**Sarah Boyack:** No, I will not give way yet.

The devolution settlement gives us powers in transport policy. We will also vigorously promote Scotland's interest in reserved matters.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Will the minister give way?

**Sarah Boyack:** Yes, I will.

**Phil Gallie:** May I correct the minister on one point? Mr Tosh referred continually to public transport issues.

What representations has the minister made concerning the provision of the air traffic control centre at Prestwick? The promise to provide such a centre has not been fulfilled by the Labour Government, and I suggest that it will not be implemented this century.

**Sarah Boyack:** It is difficult to answer several questions when only one was expected.

There has been a lot of cheap political posturing in recent days on the issues of fuel duty and reserved matters. I want to make it absolutely clear that, since the day that this Parliament was established, my colleagues and I have been second to none in standing up for Scotland's interests.

We have ensured that our interests are placed firmly on the agenda in Whitehall, both through direct contacts with Treasury ministers and through the Secretary of State for Scotland. That is true on tax and on other matters, such as the one that Mr Gallie mentioned. However, it would hardly be in Scotland's interests for me to turn my private contacts with UK Government colleagues into public diplomacy by soundbite. Those who suggest otherwise are putting narrow party politics ahead of Scotland's interests.

If anyone doubts this Executive's ability and willingness to defend and promote Scotland's interests, let them reflect on Lord Macdonald's August announcement on opening up Prestwick to freight carriers. That will give Scottish business easier access to world markets—a good outcome for Scottish business and a good outcome for Scottish jobs. That is the sort of negotiation that we are engaged in.

At the local level, we are working with local authorities. They are absolutely critical in delivering local solutions to local problems. Our first round of local transport strategies is in place. Our public transport fund will provide £90 million over three years. The first round awarded £29 million over three years to 13 local authorities, and

the second round of bids is currently being appraised.

At the national level, we are committed to making travel easier for all by delivering an effective national public transport timetable.

**Mr MacAskill:** Will the minister give way?

**Sarah Boyack:** Yes, I would be delighted.

**Mr MacAskill:** The minister spoke about making representations to central Government. During last week's meeting of the Transport and the Environment Committee, she was asked this question:

"Has the minister made representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the increase in the fuel duty escalator in addition to the market force increase?"

Her response was:

"We will consider what we can do about that, but I have not been consulted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. During the past few months, we have consulted UK Government departments, but that has not been one of the issues that we have discussed."—[*Official Report, Transport and the Environment Committee*, 8 September 1999; c 36.]

Is she now saying that she has discussed the issue with the Chancellor of the Exchequer? If so, what representations has she made about the problems caused by price increases and, in particular, the fuel duty escalator?

**Sarah Boyack:** We are indeed making representations to the UK Treasury through the correct channels.

This year, we are introducing a voluntary scheme that will provide free travel for blind people on bus and rail services. We will spend £18 million over three years to encourage freight on to rail—I welcome Mr Tosh's support for that measure. Only last week, we allocated money to LAW Mining in New Cumnock for that purpose and, on Monday, I was in Grangemouth with Lord Macdonald to announce our largest-ever award for freight road-to-rail transfer.

We are also addressing distinct issues in Scotland's rural areas. We are committed to £14 million of new investment over the next three years. Following representations from rural communities, this year we have added more to the pot for rural petrol stations to make sure that people have access to petrol in those areas. Yesterday, I announced 21 community transport awards totalling almost £500,000. From Orkney and Shetland to the Borders, rural Scotland will benefit from the development of new, innovative local transport projects that will be delivered by communities to meet their own needs.

That is not all. We will investigate what can be done to bring together aspects of rural transport,

rural development and social inclusion to provide the maximum support for accessible rural services.

We are also helping lifeline services by providing the largest-ever financial support for Caledonian MacBrayne, northern isles ferries and Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. We are building two new ferry vessels for CalMac at a cost of £20 million. Furthermore, next year we will introduce our integrated transport bill, which will contain a balanced package of measures to improve Scotland's transport services, as Mr Tosh suggested should be done.

Our proposals on charging have recently provoked a fair amount of argument. However, I hope that the debate is now coming back to earth and that we can have a serious and realistic discussion about tackling the growing problems of congestion and air quality in our cities and in our vital transport arteries. We are not doctrinaire; we will listen and take the consultation seriously.

**David McLetchie:** How can you say that you are not doctrinaire? In your document "Tackling Congestion", you say dogmatically that you will introduce congestion charges, which are wholly unproven, to achieve your aims. If you are not doctrinaire, you should have a debate about the principle of the policy, not about its mechanics.

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr McLetchie, there were six yours in that intervention.

**David McLetchie:** I beg your pardon.

**The Minister for Rural Affairs (Ross Finnie):** I thought that that was my department.

**The Presiding Officer:** Y-O-U, Mr Finnie.

**Sarah Boyack:** That is the best intervention we have had all morning.

We are not doctrinaire. The whole point of our transport strategy is to consult people. We have asked a number of questions in the transport consultation document and I await views with interest. I find ridiculous the Conservative proposal to cut short the debate and wait for a better climate before we consider the crucial issues before us. We have made it absolutely clear that, should we proceed on the back of our consultative paper, the money that we would receive from road user charging would be entirely additional; it would be new money that would be directly channelled into transport. There would be consultation and motorists would expect—and receive—value for money.

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)** *rose—*

**Sarah Boyack:** I am not giving way.

We will also introduce legislation to place bus

quality partnerships on a statutory footing to allow local authorities to introduce quality contracts where appropriate.

I recognise many local authorities' concern about recent service withdrawals and tender price increases. We have therefore commissioned a research study to examine trends in the bus market. Although there can be no return to old-style public control, bus operators cannot ignore the wider social context of their activities.

I submit that those measures represent a comprehensive and balanced programme for the future. We should be under no illusions about the extent of the challenge. Existing unsustainable transport trends are the product of decades of neglect. However, we have started a process that will deliver a transport system fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I move, as an amendment to S1M-151 in the name of Mr Murray Tosh, to leave out 'expresses concern' to the end and insert 'commends the efforts the Scottish Executive is making to tackle the consequences of 20 years of Conservative transport policies and reverse the resulting legacy of under-investment, rising congestion and environmental degradation, and calls upon the Scottish Executive to continue to work to deliver a sustainable, effective and integrated transport system through in particular the programme of government commitments on investing in public transport, promoting a national transport timetable and bringing forward a transport bill in early 2000 whilst reflecting the diverse transport needs of all Scotland's people, in particular those living in rural areas, and by so doing to take the decisions required to deliver, working with others, an integrated transport system fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.'

**Mr Tosh:** On a point of order. Is it in order to establish what the minister means in her amendment by "20 years"? Do those 20 years include either the last two years of the Callaghan Government or the first two years of the Blair Government?

**The Presiding Officer:** That is not a point of order. The minister will have a chance to respond to that point at the end of the debate.

10:06

**Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** I was astonished when the minister criticised the Tories for their over-ambitious programme in government. We have always criticised the Conservatives' lack of ambition in our country during the same years.

The debate has centred on the issues of current costs and of who is to blame for getting us into this

situation. However, we believe that there is a bigger issue to address. As I think the Tories pointed out, with the millennium approaching, we are part of a global economy and transport is fundamental for our nation to be viable and to survive economically. We need trade links to allow the economy to boom. However, we lag behind other nations because of the lack of good transport links to the south, to Europe and internationally, and that will damage us.

We need to work out a strategy to address the problems. I would like to provide a definition of the purpose of transport. First, transport should facilitate the movement of trade, commerce and people to provide a base for economic advancement in a global economy. Secondly, it should provide the structure by which people in urban and people in rural areas—who are currently excluded through geographical isolation—can be brought into the economic and social fabric of our society. That should be the fundamental ethos behind our transport policy. Such a policy should allow us both to trade externally and to look after people internally whether they are isolated in an island region or stuck in a peripheral housing scheme in one of our larger cities.

To assess the current situation, we have to examine the existing transport infrastructure. Our trunk road network is inadequate, despite the Executive's suggestion that there has been an ambitious programme of road building. We have poor ferry communications and ferry links. We await the opening of the ferry link to the European continent—and about time, too. However, of the three organisations mentioned in connection with the link in yesterday's *Edinburgh Evening News*, not one was the Scottish Executive. Where is the Executive's drive and desire to achieve that link?

We have limited air links. We talk about the financial service sector in Edinburgh but, although there are flights from the Republic of Ireland to five German cities—to the main hub and axis of the European economy—in Scotland, we can fly to only one. It is an abomination that we are used as a spur to Heathrow and Gatwick.

We were promised a direct rail link to the European continent, but that has not happened. Our trade is restricted and people going to Europe have to change at King's Cross or Euston and travel across London. That is not good enough.

Furthermore, access to rural areas is poorly resourced. Although I welcome any further funding for rural areas, the fact is that the air service in the Highlands and Islands is inadequate. Part of the problem is terminology. We should not talk about lifeline routes as if we were speaking about medivacking old grannies who are ill; we should be bringing in commerce and industry and

allowing people to access those areas.

My grandparents have benefited from being flown out to Raigmore hospital. However, if we are to make the western isles part of our booming economy in the next millennium, people should be able to fly, using a cheap and reliable service, from Stornoway either to Glasgow to make a connection or to Schipol airport.

How did this situation arise? I am a bit incredulous at the Tories' comments, which were disingenuous. I meant to ask Murray whether there had been any benefits from our rail privatisation. Perhaps he will tell us now.

**Mr Tosh:** I suggest that Mr MacAskill looks at Railtrack's £27 billion investment programme, the £2 billion programme for Scotland and the investment plans of all the franchise operators. The minister advised the Transport and the Environment Committee that the new rolling stock would be appearing in the next couple of years—

**The Presiding Officer:** Briefly.

**Mr Tosh:** Does Mr MacAskill agree that he will find the answer to his question there?

**Mr MacAskill:** The SNP is not going to take lectures from those who privatised the railways, deregulated the buses, left the public to pay the price and left a poorer service with higher prices. The only gain from rail privatisation is the gain in Railtrack's profits. Everything else remained static.

**Mr Tosh rose—**

**Mr MacAskill:** I will not take another intervention.

Let us look at the facts. Between 1979 and 1997, when the Tories were in office, traffic increased by 75 per cent. During the past 10 years, there has been a 32 per cent reduction in the number of bus-passenger journeys. The number of rail passengers has remained static; indeed, in terms of the railways, all movement has been static apart from Railtrack's profits.

**Mr Tosh rose—**

**Mr MacAskill:** Not at the moment, Murray.

We must remember that, while we were getting the M74 and the other much-needed road improvements that were mentioned, the infrastructure down south had already been built. The problems south of the border—on the M3 and the M25—are to do not with the lack of infrastructure, but with congestion. The links have been built south of the border; SNP members want Scotland to have x infrastructures and x links built, too.

The cost of motoring affects us all—motorists, consumers and businesses. It is crippling people

and harming our economy. There are two aspects to that: the fuel price escalator and Government excise duty. We are told that the fuel price escalator was introduced by the Tories, first at 3 per cent plus inflation, then at 5 per cent plus inflation and then at 6 per cent plus inflation.

The fact is that the ground has shifted under the Government's feet. The Government has to answer for its culpability in not making appropriate representations and protecting Scotland's interests. When the fuel escalator was increased to 6 per cent plus inflation, it was assumed that inflation would be 2.5 per cent. Oil prices have doubled, however, and that has meant that, in the past eight months—

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** What price would the SNP set for petrol? Where would it make up the shortfall in taxation or what services would it cut?

**Mr MacAskill:** The Government does not set the price of petrol except in terms of excise duty. The price of petrol is set by the market price and by the excise duty that is charged thereafter.

SNP members are saying that the fuel duty escalator should stop. The money that the Government gets must also be returned to Scotland. We do not accept what we are told—that we get our fair share.

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Mr MacAskill:** No, not at the moment. I have taken plenty of interventions.

Donald Dewar stated his position in the Scottish Grand Committee on 1 February this year, and his decision was predicated on the following. He said:

“The oil price is likely to stay at about \$10 to \$12 a barrel at least in the foreseeable future.”

The First Minister is not here, but the foreseeable future from 1 February would presumably include 16 September of the same year. He continued:

“Therefore, we are worlds removed from the oil prices and production levels of the mid-1980s”.—[*Official Report, House of Commons, Scottish Grand Committee, 1 February 1999; c 8.*]

Contrary to those claims, the price of oil has risen from \$10.2 a barrel to \$18.9 a barrel in only seven months. That is a 65.6 per cent increase and we are paying the price. That is why it is not good enough to say that some representations have been made since the Transport and the Environment Committee meeting. We need to stop the fuel price escalator now because it is crippling the Scottish economy, never mind the Scottish motorist. After that, we must ask what the Government does with the excise duty that it has milked from Scotland, given that it has failed to

provide the road, rail, marine and air infrastructure that I mentioned.

Let us consider the Executive proposals. First we have motorway tolls. To some extent, that issue has been dealt with by the Tory spokesman. SNP members think that the proposal is nonsense. What is the logic behind bringing in motorway tolls? Is it to help the environment? We lodged a written question about the effect motorway tolls would have on the reduction of journeys. What answer did we get? “We do not really know. It is maybe aye, maybe no; it depends on what you do and how you run it.”

**Mr Kerr rose—**

**Mr MacAskill:** Fire on, Andy.

**Mr Kerr:** Kenny opposed congestion charging for cities. He asks the Executive to give projections on a scheme that it has not even consulted on, but what effect would the SNP scheme have on the number of cars in the cities?

**Mr MacAskill:** If Andy bears with me, I will come to that.

There is a difference between user congestion charges in cities and motorway tolls. That is certainly what David Begg seems to think, and he is an adviser to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. David Begg made it clear to the Transport and the Environment Committee that he thought that motorway tolls were not on, but that user congestion charging required consideration.

There is no environmental argument in favour of motorway tolls. They will not put road users off; indeed, the Government cannot predict what effect they would have. We all know that they would cause mayhem. We do not need a transport consultant to tell us that, if there were tolls on the M8, Salsburgh, Whitburn, Harthill and West Calder would be rat-runs. The same number of people will travel, but they will choose a different route. The people who will pay the price will be those with young families and those who require to cross the road in those communities. That is why North Lanarkshire Council and West Lothian Council, which are Labour controlled, have made their position clear—they do not want motorway tolls.

**Sarah Boyack:** Does Mr MacAskill accept that the consultation paper specifies that, if any schemes are suggested—let me make it clear that the Executive has no such proposals for any stretch of our existing trunk roads or motorways—there would have to be extensive research into diversion, as there has been in other countries?

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr MacAskill, you are on your final minute.

**Mr MacAskill:** That smacks of the same U-turn

that we had the day after the consultation document was announced, when we were told that the money raised would be hypothecated.

The Government's intentions are well canvassed. The minister may try to deny it, but the public know that they are paying the highest price for petrol in Europe. Now the Executive wants to toll them, too. Tolls are simply another hidden tax—similar to air passenger duty, landfill tax and insurance tax—which will be taken from people and put into the Treasury's coffers.

**Karen Gillon:** Will the member give way?

**Mr MacAskill:** Not at them moment. [MEMBERS: "Give way."] No.

**The Presiding Officer:** The member is on his final 30 seconds.

**Mr MacAskill:** We face the possibility of petrol at £4.30 per gallon by the end of this parliamentary session. On top of that, the Labour Executive proposes road tolling. If we assume a toll at the rate of 5p a mile for the M8, motorists could have to pay close to £1,000 per annum. At the end of the Labour Executive's term, the motorist will be paying £4.30 a gallon as well as £1,000 a year for travelling up and down the M8. [Interruption.] Labour members may laugh, but the people out there know that I am right

**The Presiding Officer:** Will you finish, please.

**Karen Gillon:** Mr MacAskill has got to give way.

**Mr MacAskill:** Let me deal with congestion charging—

**Karen Gillon:** Will the member give way?

**Mr MacAskill:** Fire on. [Applause.]

**Karen Gillon:** I quote from the SNP report "Taking Scotland into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An Economic Strategy for Independence". Under the heading "Government Revenues", it says that, based on a population-based share of UK fuel duties of 8.2 per cent, the SNP would raise the required revenue. The SNP claimed that that would mean no change in fuel duty. However, Scotland's share of UK fuel duties is only 7.2 per cent of the UK total, based on inland deliveries of petrol.

**The Presiding Officer:** Ask a question.

**Karen Gillon:** How will Mr MacAskill fund that deficit?

**Mr MacAskill:** It has already been funded by the change in the price of a barrel of oil; it has been funded by what the Government has taken in petroleum revenue tax. Does Karen Gillon not think that the chancellor gets money in his pocket when the price of a barrel of oil goes up? When that document was written, the price of a barrel of

oil was far lower.

Let me deal with Andy's point about congestion charging. We believe that congestion charging is vastly different from motorway tolling. We would use it sympathetically. We would not impose it if areas did not want it. For example, Mr Lazarowicz could persuade the City of Edinburgh Council that it was a good thing and Mr Gordon could persuade Glasgow City Council that it was a bad thing. It is up to the local authorities to decide.

There must be hypothecation for transport and infrastructure. Before congestion charging is implemented, it must be predicated on improvements in public transport. People in public transport, as anyone who has spoken to them will know, say that they could not cope—

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

**Mr MacAskill:** No I will not. I am trying to wind up.

As I was saying, the present system could not cope with the increase in passengers. Congestion charging is important and should be considered for two reasons. First, there is an economic argument. In Scotland, hauliers experience delays not at Harthill on the M8, but when they enter Edinburgh or Glasgow at Barnton or Baillieston. Scotland's economic lifeblood is slowed down by traffic congestion, and if we are to allow trade and commerce to develop, we require flexibility at those bottlenecks at peak times.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Briefly, please.

**Mr MacAskill:** Secondly, there is an environmental argument, which the Tories did not mention. Our cities have an air-quality problem. In 2005, legislation will be in place and we know that half the sites within the city of Edinburgh that are currently being monitored will fail the standards. Unless we take action in the cities, the continual problem of asthma and bronchial complaints, experienced by youngsters and the elderly, will worsen. We have to address the problem in our inner cities and urban areas. That is why we are sympathetic to road user congestion charging, but say absolutely no way to motorway tolling.

On that basis, the debate returns to where we must take Scotland. We believe that the Executive is failing to deal with the problem that it inherited after 18 years of Tory administration. We see no resonance or substance in the principal motion or the amendment. The Tories are crying crocodile tears. As for the minister, I will paraphrase Norman Tebbit: "On yer bike, Ms Boyack."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** While I have no wish to curtail rumbustious debate, members must remember that significant overruns will impact on

those who want to speak.

10:21

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** I have heard it all now; the answer to the SNP's fiscal problems is that oil prices will go up and up and up. We really have heard it all today.

I welcome Mr Tosh's opening sentiments. Indeed, it is good to debate transport and Scotland's transport needs. However, in terms of policy development in Scotland, the motion is deficient for several reasons, not least of which is that it would achieve nothing and add to congestion on our roads. Further, a significant dose of hypocrisy underpins Conservative policy. The motion fails to provide the leadership, vision and honesty that we need in relation to investment in Scotland's future transport needs.

To propose, as the motion does, to increase current spending on Scotland's roads while, on the other hand, opposing congestion charging is inconsistent and illogical. It is a typical Tory policy of mutual contradictions. To then demand that the Westminster Government increase spending on transport is fine, but then—typically of the Tories—Mr Tosh somewhat missed the point. The motion does not mention public transport; the implication is clear: buses and trains are not a factor in moving people round Scotland's roads and cities.

**Mr Tosh:** Mr Scott must acknowledge that I mentioned buses and rail in my speech. I welcomed improvements in both services and the subject of strategic rail investment appears in the motion. Our view is that even if we achieve the most optimistic, realistic goals for bus and rail movements, we cannot ignore the central fact that roads will account for the vast majority of our people and vehicle movements. That is where we are coming from; we do not dismiss the importance of buses or railways.

**Tavish Scott:** The Tory policy is that the car is king; nothing has changed about that. The Tory approach in Scotland today has a discreet whiff of former Tory ministers—something of the Steve Norris approach—and the car is king. Scotland has been down that Tory single-track road and has said no; there must be a better way of approaching our needs.

Look at what happened to public transport when the Conservatives were in power. Between 1992 and 1997, there was a 12.2 per cent decrease in the number of passenger journeys on local bus services, or 65 million fewer bus trips by Scots. The number of passenger journeys by rail fell to its lowest in 1995. The Tories see the car as the only solution. That is narrow—

**Mr Tosh** rose—

**Tavish Scott:** No, Mr Tosh has already had one go; he has been up and down faster than a number of things I could mention. [*Laughter.*]

To ignore public transport is one thing, but to oppose congestion charging is another. The former is confirmation that the Tories have lost none of their prejudices; the latter illustrates a degree of hypocrisy. How Lord James can sign the motion—in particular paragraph (b), which opposes tolls—when he was the Scottish transport minister who introduced the Skye bridge tolls, is quite beyond my humble comprehension.

However, it is not fair to mention only Lord James. I will quote Ian Lang, then Secretary of State for Scotland, from the document "Paying for Better Motorways". Last week, the Tories made much of the colour of documents; the cover of this one is a nice tone of blue.

"Charging could provide another source of financing for improving roads. This would improve the service to road users . . . and ensure that we make more effective use of the existing network."

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)** rose—

**Tavish Scott:** Mr Lang concluded:

"Direct charging would . . . secure the efficiency and value for money that a market approach would bring."

This year David McLetchie said in "Stop Labour's Road Tolls":

"Labour accused the Tories of planning to introduce motorway tolls. This was simply not true."

It is interesting that this time the Tories have gone for a black cover showing a no-entry sign; that sign certainly illustrates their approach to such matters.

**Mary Scanlon** rose—

**Tavish Scott:** What did Mr Lang's document say? The Conservative party has a selective memory. No wonder Ian Lang was not invited to the state opening; he would not exactly have been among friends with the Conservatives in the chamber.

Mr Tosh referred to the Tories' introduction of the fuel price escalator, but the motion does not mention that. Presumably, the Tories are now rejecting their own policy. This debate should be about illustrating the fact that the fuel price escalator is simply one blunt instrument in the wider pursuit of the UK's international emission reduction obligations. No other European country uses just fuel prices as a single fiscal measure to meet CO<sub>2</sub> targets. Our European partners' policy instruments are improvements in public transport—which the Tories have dismissed—better vehicle energy efficiency and financial support for clean vehicles. That is the task for us.

**Mary Scanlon:** What are Mr Scott's views on paying off the Skye bridge debt and making the bridge toll free? During the 1999 election campaign, the Liberal Democrats campaigned to pay off the Skye bridge debt and won seats in the Highlands from the Labour party. How do they stand on paying off that debt now that they are in coalition with Labour?

**Tavish Scott:** The partnership agreement makes it quite clear what is happening. Mrs Scanlon should ask my colleague John Farquhar Munro, who has pursued the matter time and again. He is still pursuing it with all the relevant authorities and is taking action in the chamber to achieve progress. Perhaps Mrs Scanlon should help him rather than whingeing from the sidelines.

We need an informed debate with Westminster about the need to use a variety of policy measures, especially to alleviate the costs in Scotland's rural and island areas where the car is not an option but a necessity. That is why Liberal Democrat back benchers went to Westminster yesterday to petition the Treasury. We were seeking a fair deal for Scotland's rural motorists; we also looked at the policy instruments available to the chancellor as he considers strategy for the next budget.

The SNP's public position, as outlined on the radio, is that it opposes all congestion charging. Kenny MacAskill may shake his head, but I heard it on the radio at 7 o'clock this morning and the line was that the Tories and the SNP together oppose congestion charging. Interestingly, today we heard some qualification of that—

**David McLetchie** *rose*—

**Tavish Scott:** I am just winding up. I hope that Mr McLetchie will forgive me if I do not allow him in to support the SNP.

The crucial question for the SNP, which it did not answer last week, is how it will put more money into Scotland's transport needs. The money that the SNP raised from its "penny for Scotland" campaign was intended specifically for health, education and housing. There is nothing wrong with that, but the money was not intended for transport. We have yet to hear how the SNP would put more money into transport, and I am keen to hear clarification of that.

**Mr MacAskill:** The chancellor chooses to spend the money down south. Why did Stansted have a rail link built to improve access and create a better gateway when we have no rail link at Aberdeen, Glasgow or Edinburgh?

**Tavish Scott:** It is useful to know that it is one of the SNP's aspirations to create such links.

**Mr Kerr:** Alasdair Morgan had a 24-hour hit for the SNP with his suggestion of putting 1p on tax

for transport. However, as soon as he said it, his party bosses were on him like a ton of bricks and told him to withdraw the suggestion. Perhaps that is the route that the SNP wants to go down.

**Tavish Scott:** As is so often the case, the SNP and the Conservatives are united in their affliction—short-term memory loss. Under Ian Lang, the Tories suggested road charging. They have now forgotten that. The SNP proposed city centre congestion charging, but it has forgotten that, too.

The Liberal Democrats in Scotland support an honest debate about our transport needs. We support the amendment in the name of Sarah Boyack to implement lasting improvements to meet the transport needs of our cities and towns and our island and rural communities. There is work to be done on behalf of the people of Scotland to achieve those aims. From today's debate, it is clear that the Tory-SNP Opposition simply does not match up to the challenge.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Further to the announcement made earlier by the Presiding Officer, the debate on the motion on Continental Tyres in the name of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton will take place for 20 minutes at 2.10 pm. That will allow the minister to be present and more time for this debate, in which many members have indicated their intention to participate. This debate will conclude at 12.20 pm as originally planned.

10:31

**Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** We are losing sight of the major environmental issues that are at stake. It is worth reminding ourselves that we cannot simply accept continuing transport growth.

In 1987, 51 per cent of people owned cars. Now, the figure is 65 per cent. According to projections, car usage will increase by 53 per cent over the next 30 years. That is a real problem, and I hope that debates such as this, and the work of the Transport and the Environment Committee, will allow us to reflect maturely on the issues and to get away from the games that have been played this morning.

The fact is that, while the cost of taking a bus has increased by 24 per cent and that of taking a train has increased by 33 per cent, the cost of using a car has gone down by 5 per cent.

Emissions are an issue. Transport is responsible for 32 per cent of emissions, of which 82 per cent are caused by road transport. That is a real environmental issue that must be dealt with. We need to listen to people and take soundings on how we should deal with the situation. We need to reduce traffic on our roads to reduce emissions

and meet the international agreement to which this and previous Governments signed up.

Our streets are another issue. I am astonished that John Redwood is advocating the removal of traffic safety measures and the raising of speed limits. Communities should be reclaiming the streets, in particular for young people.

**Mr MacAskill:** I support what Mr Kerr says about home zones and speed limits, but why are such things reserved matters? Why is the hypothecation of speed camera fines, which the police in Scotland want, a matter reserved to Westminster and dealt with by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions? Why are we not competent to deal with speed limits, never mind to decide what we do with speed camera fines?

**Mr Kerr:** Never a debate goes by without Kenny or one of his colleagues raising the whole issue of the settlement debate. The country voted resoundingly in favour of the settlement in the referendum, which is why the situation is as it is.

Whenever Labour and the SNP's policies on reserved matters are discussed, the SNP fails to answer the question. Kenny has still not told us what the SNP's policy on congestion charging will do for the environment. What are the figures? What are the statistics? What would the policy deliver for Scotland and for the world environment? We still have no clear answer.

All the Executive is doing is consulting. We are a listening Government, here and at Westminster. We have spent lots of money and given lots of resources to local authorities. The results can be seen every day on our streets in the number of red and green routes that are being introduced in cities throughout Scotland. Additional funding has also been given to rural areas.

Murray Tosh, with all due respect, did not criticise the SNP at all in his speech, yet in the *Daily Mail* earlier this month, he said that the SNP

"should re-visit their policy, recognise the contradictory nature of their statements and change their approach."

There are contradictions in what the SNP says. On the one hand, it does not want charges—it does not want the fuel duty escalator or road charging—but it cannot say what it will do instead. How would the SNP fund the major changes that are required? How would the modal shifts that Murray talked about—the need to get people out of their cars and on to public transport—be achieved? The SNP has no solution.

When asked the same question on the radio, Kenny MacAskill had no answer either. I have the transcript of the radio programme. The interviewer asked him how, if he wanted to reduce fuel duty charges and did not want to introduce any charges

or road tolls, he would fund improvements. He had no reply. I hope that when Linda Fabiani sums up, she will. I am glad that the full SNP team is here, because there are questions to be answered about the party's policies.

The SNP has never delivered and continues not to deliver for Scotland's environment. Our approach is to say that we need an integrated policy that will deliver on public transport, for the private car user, for business and for the economy. The position of the SNP and its Tory Opposition colleagues is simply to say, "No, no, no" to any charges, without presenting any realistic alternatives to the Government's proposals.

It is absolute hypocrisy for the SNP to criticise the Executive for considering user charges when in past manifesto statements the SNP has said that it would examine the issue of road pricing and road charging.

We need to get back to the issue of the environment and address the roads problem maturely. Too many people are using their cars because public transport is not good enough to make them change, but the roads are not good enough for them to use because of the number of vehicles on them.

Those issues must be addressed through an integrated policy, as set out clearly in the Executive's motion. This is the first time in many years that an integrated approach to transport has been adopted, and it is thanks to this Parliament that we can deliver an integrated strategy for Scotland.

I hope that members will support the Executive's position, which is the only way in which we can deliver for road users, for those who use public transport and for the environment, particularly on emissions.

10:37

**John Young (West of Scotland) (Con):** "We will save before we spend. We have made no proposals to raise personal taxation for individual families. Indeed we would like to reduce taxes for ordinary families."

Who said that? It was Tony Blair, before the election, yet Labour's transport plans will cost ordinary families at least an extra £100 per month.

Tavish Scott, who unfortunately has disappeared from the chamber, may be a man of honour and honesty, but at a BBC television debate before the election on 6 May at the Museum of Transport in Glasgow, he heard many Liberal Democrat party members from the Highlands say that the car was a necessity—the car was king. Now, he is accusing the Conservatives of making the car king, yet his own

people think the same thing. Perhaps he is away now getting a few calls from people telling him that. Who knows?

I do not intend to get into the big battle between Labour and the SNP, but the cost of congestion charges, which the SNP supports, will be more than £1 every time users enter a city.

**Bruce Crawford:** Will the member give way?

**John Young:** I will not give way just now. I might give way further down the line, once I have got into my speech.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Members should try to keep their speeches to a maximum of five minutes.

**John Young:** There was a transport debate in Polmont just before the election at which people from the transport sector, politics and the local community were represented. What came through loud and clear was that they wanted transport to be a top priority. It had to be on the same level as education and health—the three big items, as one speaker put it.

Railways are important—no one is denying that they are crucial. However, if we take everything from the road hauliers and put it on the railways, there will be real problems for the road haulage industry. There must be a balance. We should not forget that many foreign truckers who come to this country are on routing orders. In the whisky industry, all the costs within the United Kingdom are paid up to the port of departure, which the foreign companies indicate must be in the south of England. That is a problem.

So far, the minister—no doubt instructed by John Prescott's office—has talked about motorway tolls, local government levies, congestion charges and parking charges. There is also the business about ring fencing. Will there or will there not be ring fencing? It is a sort of ring-a-ring o' roses and we all fall down—roads, motorists and everyone else.

Shortly, we will have the roads review. Do not hold your breath. Will a public roads building programme be unveiled? Will a priority upgrading be carried out, or will we hear that the public road building programme is at a halt, unless paid for by the private sector? So far, companies have shown reluctance to become involved in major private finance initiatives, despite the Labour Government's invitations.

**Bruce Crawford:** Will John give way now?

**John Young:** I am sorry, but I have so little time that I do not propose to give way.

The £180 million extension of the M74 into central Glasgow is unlikely to go ahead. There are doubts about the plans to convert the entire M8

from Glasgow to Edinburgh into a six-lane motorway—those plans are also unlikely to go ahead. What about the A77? It is estimated that within six years, 30 lives could be saved and 240 serious accidents avoided for a public purse contribution of £10 million per annum. In the past three years, that killer road has claimed more than 15 lives in more than 40 serious accidents. One highly dangerous 10-mile section, which runs from Fenwick to what is called the Malletsheugh, is used by 35,000 vehicles per day. It is essential that money is spent on that road, which has the worst accident rate in Scotland—there is no question about that.

I am told—I have no doubt that the minister will confirm this—that there are five main criteria for designating moneys, which I presume apply to all 17 schemes: economy, safety, environmental impact, accessibility and integration. All five criteria apply to the A77: make no mistake about that.

I use public transport every day and always have. This morning, I came with Frank McAveety on public transport. The train was a bit better than usual and the company was very good, but I accept that our public transport is lagging far behind that of our counterparts on the continent. There is no question about that, and it is essential that public transport is brought to the fore.

Much has been said about the environment. The environment knows no boundaries and we should make no bones about that. Labour members of Glasgow City Council—some former members of which are here today—discussed making Glasgow a nuclear-free zone. We might as well draw a chalk circle round the bottom of a lamppost, in order to tell dogs that it is a no-peeing zone, as such things cannot be stopped. The main offenders where the real problems are found are the United States, Russia, China, Brazil and Indonesia. We should try to set an example. This is a relatively small country and we should do our best.

Scotland makes up 31 per cent of the landmass of the British Isles, but has only 9 per cent of the population. It is obvious that we need around five different transport strategies: one each for the Highlands, the Islands, the north-east, the central belt and the Borders. I have no doubt that the Conservative party in Scotland is the answer to those problems.

We are against tolls and we are against the imposition of more taxes. The Liberal Democrats will simply go along with Labour—they want to keep their ministerial seats, and will do and say anything to keep in with Labour. I urge members to support Murray Tosh's excellent motion.

10:43

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab):** I support Sarah Boyack's amendment.

The Labour Government came to power in the UK promising to start to provide an integrated transport system. The Scottish Labour party went to the electorate in May promising to continue that approach, and I am glad to see that it has been taken up by the Executive and is now the subject of wide consultation with the people of Scotland.

Under the Tories, our transport network was crumbling, crippled through lack of investment. As has been said, they cut money for road improvement and gave up on local transport and congestion. In fact, the Tories gave up on the car owner, the transport industry and the one in three households that do not own a car and that depend on public transport in order to get about. The Tories ignored our growing transport needs and, as the Deputy Prime Minister has said, the Tories caused the traffic jams that we see across the country.

**John Young** *rose*—

**Cathie Craigie:** I will not give way to John Young—he did not give way, so neither will I.

Scotland needs a transport policy that will tackle the problems of congestion, pollution and social exclusion.

**Bruce Crawford:** Cathie, will you give way?

**Cathie Craigie:** Yes, I will—[*Laughter.*]

**Bruce Crawford:** I want to share some of your thoughts, Cathie, as I think that you agree that the real hypocrisy comes from the Conservatives. They destroyed the roads network across Scotland during their time in power. As an example, the minor roads in Perth and Kinross are supposed to be relaid every 25 years, not every 75 years.

**Cathie Craigie:** I think I need the protection of the Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Be brief, Mr Crawford.

**Bruce Crawford:** Do you agree that that is Conservative hypocrisy?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Remarks should be made through the chair, and should be in the form of a question.

**Cathie Craigie:** Thank you, Bruce, for that intervention.

Scotland needs a transport policy that will deliver and that will tackle the problems that we are experiencing. In delivering that policy, the Executive must work in partnership with the people—with car owners and with all providers of

rail and bus services. In Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, which is the area that I represent, we can see the difference made by the Government, local authorities, ScotRail and various bus companies, which are working together to ensure that trains and buses run to meet the needs of the people they serve.

New investment will mean improvements to train and bus services. New timetables and more frequent buses and trains mean that public transport will become more attractive and will encourage many more people to leave their cars and to use public transport. However, costs are important to the travelling public, and we should ensure that affordable fares represent value for money. I hope that the Executive, and Sarah Boyack as the responsible minister, will take that on board.

I want to talk specifically about the people of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, who live with one of the most congested roads in Scotland. The A80 runs through the middle of the constituency; members who have travelled on that road will know that it is a nightmare, particularly at peak times. We have waited for improvements for 20 years to that part of the road, which is the missing link in the central Scotland motorway network. Delays on the A80 not only cause disruption to the motorist, but cause accidents and grave disruption in the surrounding towns and villages, when, for whatever reason, cars are forced on to minor roads in order to avoid the hold-ups and delays on the A80. The Tories put off investing in the A80 time and again. They alone are to blame for the congestion that we see—and hear about on the radio—every day in that part of Scotland.

**John Young** *rose*—

**Cathie Craigie:** No, I will not give way—Mr Young did not give way and so I will not give way to him.

**John Young:** I did not give way to the SNP.

**Cathie Craigie:** I have raised my constituents' concerns with the minister and I look forward to the publication of the strategic roads review. I hope that it will include measures to reduce the congestion in the towns and villages along the route of the A80. I hope that there will be a large number of respondents to the Government's consultation paper and that the exercise will produce a transport policy that will provide genuine choice to meet the needs of the people of Scotland.

I return to the point that was made by my friend from the SNP benches, Bruce Crawford. The Tory motion is a hypocritical sham, and I ask the Parliament to reject it.

10:48

**Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** I am sure that most members in the chamber agree that the Tories have a bit of a brass neck to lecture this Parliament on any aspect of transport. Everyone here knows that it was their disastrous introduction of bus deregulation that brought about the precipitous decline in bus use over the last decade or more.

As with the poll tax, Scotland suffered most, with a 32 per cent decline in the number of bus passenger journeys in the past decade, compared with 17 per cent for the UK as a whole. The drop in the number of passengers in the rural areas of Scotland has been twice that in urban areas—and the supposed defenders of rural Scotland caused it.

**Mr Tosh:** Would it not be fair to say that two of the biggest transport companies in the world—Scottish-based and Scottish-owned—came about as a direct result of that deregulation?

**Mr Gibson:** Did that benefit the customers? Did that help the socially excluded? Did that help people who have to travel to work? Did that make timetables more reliable? Did that put more buses on the road? Of course it did not.

**Mr Tosh:** It did, actually.

**Mr Gibson:** No, I am afraid it did not. I am sorry, but that is factually inaccurate. I suggest that Mr Tosh look at the report, "Scottish Transport Statistics". Perhaps then he would stand corrected.

**Mr Tosh:** If Mr Gibson looks, he will find that the number of kilometres covered by buses on our roads network has been rising steadily. He will find that the number of buses and coaches on our roads has not only risen steadily but is projected to continue to rise steadily. The issue is that passenger use has declined steadily since the 1950s. The issue is not that deregulation caused the decline in bus use, but that bus use declines as prosperity rises and people take to the roads. That is the issue that we must address.

**Mr Gibson:** I am sorry to disagree with Mr Tosh, but as I have already said there has been a 32 per cent decrease in bus use since deregulation. In the year immediately after deregulation there was a 10 per cent decrease in use. That decline continues. There was a 6 per cent reduction in bus passenger journeys last year alone, whereas car use has not increased at all during the past three years.

When deregulation commenced, the idea behind competition was that it would lead to better and more frequent services and lower fares. That has not happened. I am sure that we all recall the chaos in towns and cities following deregulation.

Town centres and high streets were chock-a-block with buses during the highly profitable rush hour, but services were slashed or abandoned for the rest of the unprofitable day and without the centres. Bus services have never recovered.

There is a problem developing bus service infrastructure in the deregulated environment as there is no certainty that operators will use it. Timetables can be changed without notice, leading to a fall in potential users' confidence that a bus will turn up from day to day. In the area covered by Strathclyde Passenger Transport, there are 154 operators, leaving potential users baffled.

**John Young** *rose*—

**Mr Gibson:** John, we have debated many a long year, but if you do not allow people to intervene, I will not allow you to intervene on me.

**John Young** *rose*—

**Mr Gibson:** I am sorry, John, I will not let you in.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order. Kenny Gibson has the floor.

**Mr Gibson:** The number of staff employed by bus and coach operators has also fallen—by 15 per cent in 10 years. Bus fares in Scotland have risen by 79 per cent during the past decade, which is 24 per cent above inflation.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will Kenny give way to me? I am not Mr Tosh.

**Mr Gibson:** Can you give me a tick? I have quite a lot to get through.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** It might be helpful to members if I say that in a five-minute speech up to four interventions might be reasonable, otherwise members further down the list who wish to speak will not get called.

**Mr Gibson:** I am not even a quarter of the way through, Brian, otherwise I would let you in, honestly.

**Mr Tosh** *rose*—

**Mr Gibson:** In the first year of the new Labour Government, fares rose 7.9 per cent in Scotland. The decreasing confidence in bus services has led to a 28 per cent increase in car use on Scotland's roads over the last decade, causing much of the congestion that we have debated today. Most obviously, the increasing reliance on private cars has directly reduced the market for public transport. The consequence of that has been a reduction in the viability of significant parts of the public transport network. In turn, that has led to service withdrawals or reductions and to increases in fares—which increases the relative attractiveness of car ownership.

The potential for a continuing cycle of decline in public transport use and provision is self-evident. Public transport must be organised and marketed in order to attract more people—particularly marginal car users—back on to it. Inter-modal ticketing is important, and we need to maintain the affordability of public transport for pensioners, disabled people and the low-paid.

What has been the Executive's approach to public transport? On 13 September, the *Evening Times* quoted the minister, Sarah Boyack, as having said that she wanted other towns and cities to copy Glasgow's new overground bus operations:

"I expect that our forthcoming decisions on authorities' bids for public transport fund support will encourage bus operators right across Scotland to deliver similar improvements."

If she had read the *Evening Times* on 9 September, only four days previously, she would have seen the headline, "Bus firms are slammed over city services". That article said:

"Bus firms in Glasgow have been slammed by council and transport bosses after claims that passengers are being left without a bus service."

Alistair Watson, chair of the land services committee on Glasgow City Council was quoted as saying that Balornock, for example, is left without a bus service every night after 6 o'clock. He added that Ms Boyack might consider new routes to regulate firms, because the number of routes being abandoned by the private bus companies means that the public budget for subsidising services has already been spent. Services are thus no longer available.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** One minute.

**Mr Gibson:** One minute, George.

Locals are furious at the new bus services. They claim that the providers are interested only in profits and that they are ignoring the public. The following day, 10 September, another *Evening Times* article contained similar remarks. FirstGlasgow's press release said that the overground was supposed to be a

"groundbreaking service designed specifically to increase bus journeys by making access simple and easy."

That is an example of a supposed quality partnership in action. What we need is quality contracts, not quality partnerships in which one or more partners may move the goalposts. We must regulate operators through negotiated contracts that are legally enforceable. Those contracts must ensure that timetables are adhered to and that a realistic pricing structure is put in place to enable people on a minimum wage and the socially excluded to afford to travel to work.

We must insist on high standards of comfort and

safety and on more low-floor, articulated, high-capacity vehicles that will allow increased access to the disabled. The best operators will support such contracts because they will provide stability and keep out the numerous cowboys. We need an integrated public transport network that provides effective and affordable links to ensure that every community has full access to employment opportunities, leisure and shopping facilities.

Andy Kerr raised a point about the environment to which I would like to respond. Why has the Government changed the national air strategy so that, rather than action being taken in an area when particulates register above a safe level on four occasions in a year, action is now taken only when particulates register above safe levels 35 times over the year?

10:55

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** I was pleased that, during a recent visit to Moffat in Dumfriesshire to hand over a community minibus, the Minister for Transport and the Environment acknowledged that in rural areas the car is the only viable form of transport for many people and that that was likely to be the case for the foreseeable future. It is vital that that statement is backed up by deeds. The whole tone of Government policy and action is profoundly urban and anti-car, painting the car driver, no matter their need, as a pariah.

The contrast between car use in the city and in rural areas is marked. I have found that myself, living in Edinburgh for even a few days a week. From the flat here, I can walk—and I am happy to do so—to the range of facilities that I need. I can get a bus from early in the morning to well into the evening. That is not the case for people who live in small towns and villages across Scotland.

For example, in the town of Langholm—again in Dumfriesshire—a major survey was done into the cost of building and running a swimming pool adjacent to the town's school. The survey showed that although funding would be available from various sources to construct the pool, the running costs could not be met by use. While the community accepts that providing that facility is not possible on a cost basis, it cannot accept the extraordinarily high cost of fuel in the area, or that people should be penalised for travelling to and from facilities in neighbouring towns—or across the border to Carlisle, which is some 20 miles away.

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**David Mundell:** Certainly, Elaine. Having read the description of you in today's edition of *The Scotsman*, I could not but take an intervention

from you.

**Dr Murray:** David mentioned Langholm. Surely he agrees that one of the problems there is the volume of traffic that flows through the town centre and the problems that that causes for public safety. He is stressing the needs of the car driver. His party has said that it is committed to public transport. What would he do to improve public transport and take some of those vehicles off the road?

**David Mundell:** I am about to address public transport in rural areas. Like Elaine, I said at a public meeting that I am committed to a bypass for Langholm. I was interested to see that, in reply to Elaine's written question about improvements on the A7, the minister said that that bypass would not happen in the foreseeable future.

Travelling within Edinburgh is not a problem, but travelling to Edinburgh from the south-west is a major problem. A car is the only practical solution. I have tried to use a train service directly from our regional office in Dumfries. It would take three and a half hours for a journey which, as the crow flies, must be about 80 miles. Alternatively, I could go to Lockerbie station, but I would be unable to get a train that allows me to be here for the start of parliamentary business—and I would have to leave before its conclusion.

I am not holding myself out as the requirement for services, but it is not unreasonable to suggest that business people would want to come to Edinburgh for a conference where registration might be between 9 am and 9.30 am.

**Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)** *rose—*

**Karen Gillon** *rose—*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cathy Jamieson.

**Cathy Jamieson:** Does the member agree that rather than being concerned about his own transport arrangements or those of the business community, we ought to be concerned about opportunities for people in rural areas to access education, health services and the other necessities of daily life? Does he also agree that his party has proposed absolutely nothing that will enable people in rural communities to use those facilities?

**David Mundell:** I was just about to come to that point. There is still no real alternative to the car after two years of Labour government, so it is no wonder that Government rhetoric appears to be empty and anti-rural.

Having accepted that there is a difference between rural and urban transport needs, will the minister take that fact fully on board and do

something about the problems?

As others have said, the most fundamental thing that can be done in the short term is to lobby colleagues in the UK Government on fuel tax, and in particular to lobby the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Driving rural motorists off the road does not save the environment. I recently travelled from Langholm to Eskdalemuir and did not pass another car on the journey. The roads are not full of traffic—there is very little traffic on them. High fuel charging will damage the environment because, with the other difficulties that they face, they will drive upland farmers off the land. We will lose the managed hill landscape of much of Scotland that we have come to value so much.

My final point is in connection with the maintenance of rural roads, particularly minor roads. It is vital that we continue with maintenance programmes. A lack of rural road maintenance impacts on the morale of communities and makes them think that the Government and councils are not concerned about them. It also gives tourists a bad impression. Their expenditure offers the principal opportunity for economic development.

As my colleague Mr Tosh said, roads and economic development are inextricably linked, and nowhere more so than in rural Scotland. It is about time the Scottish Executive accepted that.

11:03

**Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** Moran tàing, a' cheannard, agus bha mi air son aig tòiseachadh tòiseachdainn, facal neo dhà a' gabhail ann an cànan a' Ghaidheil. Tha mise a' fuireach an drasda ann an àite ann an iomall air a' Ghaidhealteachd, far am bheil sinne a' pàigheadh cìsean air rathaidean mar-thà. 'Se sin cìsean as àirde anns an Rionn Eòrpa. Chaidh sin a' steidheachadh bho Riaghaltas nan Tories, bho'n a bha iadsan a' riaghladh ann an Lunnainn. Tha e a' cur ionghantas orm agus tha e gu math neònach gu bheil iad ag iarraidh na cìsean agus na ceistean mu dheidhinn cìsean a tharruing dhe na prìomh rathaidean ann an Alba.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Tapadh leibh, Iain. 'Se obair latha, tòiseachadh.

As the Gaels say; getting started can be a whole day's work. When speaking in Gaelic, members should provide a brief translation. If they wish to give a full speech in Gaelic, members should give the Presiding Officer 48 hours' advance notice.

**Mr Munro:** Thank you. I introduced a few words of Gaelic as a matter of principle. I know that in the weeks and months ahead the Parliament will make simultaneous translation available if members wish to use the language of the garden

of Eden in this magnificent building.

I will give a brief translation of what I want to say in this transport debate.

I live in a rural area of Scotland where toll charges have already been imposed on a trunk road—the Skye bridge crossing. The tolls there were introduced by the Tory Administration and it seems strange to me that we are debating a motion lodged by the Tories to address that situation. In the motion they suggest that we abolish the concept of toll charging on trunk roads. There would seem to be a difference of opinion between them and the previous Tory Administration.

I hope that the Conservatives will hold to the view in the motion when we come to debate the sensitive issue of the Skye bridge tolls.

Mr Mundell is very much in line with my thoughts on integrated transport and rural transport issues. He mentioned the lack of congestion and pollution on rural roads. Congestion and pollution are mentioned in relation to cities or in an urban context, but they are not something that we in rural Scotland suffer from. I do not see much pollution or congestion on our Highland roads outside the main urban centres.

Serious consideration should be given to the periphery of rural areas. I can think of areas in Skye where the road system is deteriorating. The road systems in the west Highlands and the far north have deteriorated. There cannot be an effective and efficient integrated transport system unless there is the infrastructure that goes with that.

It is not surprising that our Highland roads are sadly in need of attention; over the past four years the budgets that are available to the council in the area have been reduced dramatically. Highland Council's revenue budget has fallen from £28 million to £18 million. Its capital budget has fallen from £16 million to £3.6 million. If I tell members that it costs £1.2 million to build a two-lane road, they will imagine what little attention will be given to roads in those rural areas.

I have said that rural areas do not have problems of congestion and pollution. Mr Young said that the Tories have all the answers. I wonder whether they do. I would be glad to hear what their proposals are, because much of the deterioration and problems that we have now are as a result of 18 years of Tory administration.

Yesterday, some Liberal Democrat colleagues and I delivered a petition on fuel prices. It had been circulated in the Highlands for two or three weeks prior to the election when, I am pleased to say, 18,000 people signed it. By the time we delivered it yesterday that figure was in excess of

20,000. We delivered it to the Treasury and I hope that Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown will consider doing something about the heavy fuel costs in Scotland and the adverse effects that they have on rural Scotland.

**Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con):** Did Mr Munro draw to the attention of the chancellor the Liberal Democrat policy of having an 8 per cent real-terms increase in the fuel duty escalator, and its plans to further tax bigger engines such as those used in Land Rovers in the far outer reaches of Scotland? Will moves be made to change that policy?

**Mr Munro:** The Liberal Democrat policy has not changed. Our policy of imposing a levy on fuel costs was a green policy designed to address the issue of congestion and pollution in cities. We adhere to that. We employ a quite different concept when we address the difficulties of rural Scotland.

The fuel petition has been delivered previously to the Office of Fair Trading and we await a response.

I need not tell anyone in here of the adverse effect of high fuel prices in rural Scotland, but 85 per cent of the cost of fuel is taken up by taxes of one form or another.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson):** Please wind up now.

**Mr Munro:** I thank Parliament for giving me the opportunity to start my speech in Gaelic, which—as everybody knows—is the language of the garden of Eden. I am sure that many great debates in the past were in Gaelic and I am sure that we will get that opportunity in the months and weeks ahead.

11:11

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I have a great interest in transport as I represent a rural area. This Executive has shown that it recognises the challenges to transport provision in rural areas. I would like more to be done, but many initiatives have gone largely unnoticed.

Work has been done to move freight off the roads by providing freight facilities grants to companies such as Safeway plc, which enables them to remove 30,000 trucks from the A9. Local Highland companies such as Lovat Pride Mineral Water have also begun to transport freight by train.

In Caithness, Norfrost has built a freight terminal at Georgemas Junction, which has been used by other companies to move steel pipes, aviation fuel, flagstones and timber off the roads.

This is only the start. By moving freight on to the

railways, we not only cut the cost to companies by a third, but cut pollution and free up the road system. Previous Governments cut funding for road maintenance but did nothing to ease the pressure on the roads.

Ferries have also benefited. CalMac's grant has increased by £3.2 million, and it has received additional funding to build two new ferries. That will help it enhance the service it provides. Northern isles ferries have also benefited by their grant being increased by 25 per cent. Yesterday's announcement of a 25 per cent increase in spending on the rural transport fund was a huge boost.

I would like to list all the organisations in the Highlands and Islands that have benefited from the increase, but I do not think that I will have time. I particularly welcome the funding for social car schemes and dial-a-bus services. It not only provides for people to become less dependent, but allows those without access to cars to become self-reliant: they do not have to depend on friends, family or neighbours to take them shopping. The Executive's policy goes a long way towards tackling social exclusion in rural areas.

Much has been made of high fuel taxes and their effects on rural areas. I look forward to the Office of Fair Trading report on fuel pricing. I hope that it will lead to equal pricing between rural and urban areas. Over the past decade, many petrol stations have had to close. The rural petrol stations grant has stemmed that decline, ensuring that many rural filling stations can continue to trade. The grant ensures that people in rural areas have access to petrol locally and do not have to travel a huge distance to buy it.

Those initiatives are real investments that make a difference to people's lives throughout the Highlands and Islands and the rest of rural Scotland. I support Sarah Boyack's amendment.

11:12

**Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland)**

**(Con):** I shall contain my remarks to points of safety. I do not know everyone's listening habits in the morning, but I always listen to the traffic reports by the whirly girlie or from the eye in the sky or by one of those leather-clad motorcyclists, with their on-the-spot assessment of traffic build-ups on the major roads. It will come as no surprise—as I served notice on it in my first speech in the chamber—that the road that causes me and thousands of others the most concern is the A77, which is rightly known as the killer road.

When I was a girl living in East Kilbride, a trip to the seaside, on the Ayrshire coast, was a delightful anticipation. The journey over Fenwick moor and the A77, with its bumps and hollows,

was as thrilling as any white-knuckle ride at a theme park. But that was 40 years ago. At 39 and holding, Kay Ullrich would certainly not remember anything that far back—or she would not admit to it. Forty years ago, there were not as many cars on the road and they did not travel as fast as they do nowadays. The A77 was a dangerous road then; it is positively lethal now.

Apart from filter lanes and a small stretch of dual carriageway with lighting at the Galston Road end, the road has changed little between Malletsheugh and Fenwick. That the road is busier now is beyond question.

I added to the volume of traffic when I stood as a candidate in Kilmarnock and Loudoun. The upgrading of the A77 was one of the main campaigning issues. Its importance far outweighed the concerns about education, taxes, jobs and the economy, important though those issues are. The message was loud and clear: "Do something about that killer road."

I attended the meeting on 12 November at Fenwick, when Calum Macdonald was in charge of the strategic roads review and came to hear the strength of local feeling. The local community council was represented, as was East Ayrshire Council, and many others came to express their support for the upgrading of the road. Figures showing that the road was carrying motorway volume traffic were incontrovertible—all that on a road with two lanes in each direction, but no central barrier or reservation.

At peak traffic times, it takes only a millisecond's distraction for an accident of catastrophic proportions to happen. There does not have to be a driver at fault; an accident can be caused by someone coming in the opposite direction moving out by a fraction to pass a bus or lorry. At 60 mph in each direction—that is the speed limit—there are not many who walk away from a head-on collision unscathed. We are not all as fortunate as Jacques Villeneuve in having a wall of tyres piled high and five deep to hit.

What happens on the dreadful days when there is a serious accident on the A77? The air ambulance is frequently summoned to deal with the casualties, because medics cannot get through by the road. Traffic is diverted through the village of Fenwick, or perhaps through Kilmaurs and Stewarton, on roads that were never meant to carry such a volume of traffic. In winter, it is worse still, because the minor roads through those villages are not gritted.

Tens of thousands of people use the road every day to commute to work. Thousands of people in the area do as I do in the morning and listen for the traffic update, advising that there are no major problems on the A77: that members of their family

will have arrived at work safe and sound.

The experience is repeated at the end of the working day until there is that reassuring sound of a car door closing and the key in the door signalling that another journey on the killer road has been safely completed. If the Minister for Transport and the Environment doubted the strength of feeling about the road, I can assure her that the three candidates who stood in the Kilmarnock and Loudoun constituency all heard the same pleas and are now members of this Parliament. Margaret Jamieson is not in the chamber, but Cathy Jamieson is: she will remember. Alex Neil was there too. We have all heard the same pleas.

We all attended a meeting on 21 June, organised by the councillor for the area and queen of the campaigners, Katie Cochrane. We pledged to work together on the issue. This must be a first for the Parliament: in this debate we are all singing from the same hymn sheet. We have the support of Fenwick community council, East Ayrshire Council, Enterprise Ayrshire, the Ayrshire chamber of commerce, the Westminster MP and the numerous MSPs from various parties who represent constituencies in the area.

I give the minister fair warning now that the requests will not stop. The A77 is a road that has to be tamed, and we will not give up. I know that she has finally responded to our request for a meeting, which is to take place on 4 October. I look forward to talking with her then.

I read in newspaper reports that the minister has no money for roads, so I ask her, between now and our October meeting, to talk to the money men—the boys holding the purse strings—and get an advance on the chancellor's war chest. She should not save that up for votes at the general election, but spend the money now and save lives.

As recently as this morning, I heard the minister comment that she was looking forward to this debate and that the Government had a record to be proud of. Not on this road. The improved signage and bright cats'-eyes are appreciated, even by me, when I have a late surgery or consultation.

I intended to mention the accident statistics, but John Young, who is not in the chamber, stole my thunder. I ask for the safety aspects regarding the A77 to be considered. Money should be spent on it.

11:18

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** I urge members to pause for a moment and remind themselves about one of the key issues of this debate, not just here in Scotland or the UK, but

across the world.

We are given a salutary reminder in *The Scotsman* of this morning, following the publication by the United Nations

“of the most authoritative assessment yet of the crisis facing mankind.

Severe water shortages, the effects of global warming and chronic air pollution are among the ‘full-scale emergencies’ threatening the planet . . . The UK is an acknowledged world leader in global efforts to tackle climate change”.

Air pollution and emissions are among the prime causes of climate change. It is eight years since the Rio earth summit, and the Scottish Executive is firm in its view that doing nothing is not an option.

There can be few things in Scotland today that deserve as high a place on the Scottish Executive's agenda as transport strategy, the stark contrast between congestion in city centres and the problem of access to transport in rural and semi-rural areas, and the crucial issue of peripherality in the wider European picture. How are we to embrace the big-picture issues and integrate them into our parochial picture? We desperately need strategies to tackle those issues. I support the Executive amendment in the name of Sarah Boyack and I am certain that big issues and parochial issues alike will be in excellent hands with her.

In memoriam, lest we forget the Tory legacy, we should ask ourselves who got us into this traffic jam. The Tories now have no strategy and no policy. Kenny MacAskill used the words “quite disingenuous” to describe the Tories' approach to transport matters. Who introduced the fuel duty escalator in 1994? Who introduced the tolls on the Skye road bridge that have since been cut by Labour? Who privatised and broke up the rail network? So desperate is the situation now that no layperson knows who is in charge.

**Mr Tosh:** Will Helen Eadie give way?

**Helen Eadie:** Mr Tosh did not give way to me, so I will not give way to him.

Who published a transport green paper in 1996 that declared a presumption in favour of introducing legislation to enable congestion charging and area licensing to be implemented? Who raised £24 billion a year in tax but spent only £4 billion on roads? By abandoning the fuel duty escalator, the Tories have not only abandoned their environmental programme, but opened up a huge spending hole.

**Mr Tosh** *rose*—

**Helen Eadie:** The Tory motion does not even mention support for public transport, although more than a third of households in Scotland do not

have a car. Are the people of Scotland aware that the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents has condemned the Tory proposal to raise speed limits? How does that chime with the pleas of community councils and residents' associations for traffic calming measures? Where are the park-and-ride schemes across Scotland? They are few and far between. Labour authorities throughout Scotland developed them in spite of, not because of, the previous Tory Government's approach. Contrast the Tories' approach with that of a Government that has a clear strategy to support the development of integrated road and transport policies.

The real enemy of business and the car user is congestion. The Confederation of British Industry estimates that clogged roads cost Britain £20 billion a year. I applaud the sound intervention that Bruce Crawford made this morning, when he attacked the Tories. I have to ask, however, whether the SNP will vote with the Tories on an amendment that will allow the level of transport spending to be determined by Westminster.

The SNP campaign flies in the face of the comments that were made by its transport spokesperson at the Scottish Parliament Transport and the Environment Committee, and contradicts the SNP manifesto and the motion that was placed before last year's SNP conference by the party's leadership. The SNP has just joined the Green grouping in the European Parliament. It has always pretended to be all things to all voters. In Europe, however, SNP members sit with the Greens, among whose policies is the introduction of a 7 per cent fuel duty escalator and a doubling of the price of fossil fuels.

Tavish Scott was right to expose the hypocrisy of SNP members. They tried to hide their budget for independence throughout the Scottish general election campaign, and eventually published it in April 1999. In that proposed budget they allocated fuel duty without any reduction. The manifesto stated that the SNP would support city centre charging schemes. Last year, the SNP conference endorsed a motion recognising that car pricing schemes may provide the revenue that is needed to develop alternatives.

I look at my Tory friends across the chamber and ask, "Who introduced bus deregulation?" That policy left rural areas all over Scotland with no bus service at all. The Scottish Executive proposes quality partnerships, and the Scottish transport partnership proposals clearly state that standards, specifications and levels of service will be developed and embraced by local authorities throughout Scotland. This is the first attempt to deliver, in partnership with the bus companies rather than in confrontation with them, a real service to the people whom we really care about.

Murray Tosh spoke about caring. If the Tories really cared, why have they not set those standards and specifications? The Scottish Executive's exciting proposals deserve to be embraced with vigour. I welcome the statement that was made by Sarah Boyack on Monday, allocating £10 million to freight transport. A Government that is committed to such policies is long overdue.

11:25

**Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)**

**(LD):** When I first read the Conservative motion in the business bulletin, I thought that there was a mistake—that the date should have been 1 April instead of 15 September. The antipathy of the iron lady to the iron horse was legendary, and that is just one of the problems with the Conservative motion.

In the Scottish Borders, 96 per cent of the population has access to one or more cars. That is not because it is an affluent area—the Borders has a history of low pay—but because of the problems of delivering bus services to a sparse population over a large rural area.

Let me give some examples of a commuting day from the Borders to Edinburgh. The round trip from Eyemouth to Edinburgh takes three hours on the bus, from Kelso and Jedburgh it takes three and a half hours, and from Hawick it takes four and a half hours. It is impossible to make the journey to Edinburgh from Duns, the county town of Berwickshire.

Travelling from east to west, there are also severe difficulties. A student constituent told me recently that she travels from Cockburnspath to Hawick for her studies, and the round trip of 100 miles involves her commuting for five hours a day on the bus.

There is no railway line either. I welcome the feasibility study into the possibility of reopening the Waverley line. It should be viewed not as a local project, but as a significant national project for Scotland, providing a third rail route into England. We await with great interest the publication of that study in November or December. I urge the Executive not to rule out any options at any stage of the feasibility study, but to consider the economic benefits.

**Mr Tosh:** I share Mr Robson's sentiments about the Waverley line, which I well remember as a boy living in Hawick. I also remember the Waverley line being closed by a Labour Government. Does he agree that the cost of reopening the Waverley line—and we should keep an open mind as to whether it should reopen in part or as a whole—should be borne by general taxation if there is to be any public sector input, rather than being

funded by tolls levied on commuters from the Borders, who already face high transport charges in a low-wage area?

**Euan Robson:** There is a case for public investment in that railway line, but I am not sure how that investment is to be achieved. However, there is a major opportunity to open the line and relieve congestion in Edinburgh. If one considers the rates of commuting from the Borders to Edinburgh, it is evident that much could be achieved by the reintroduction of the railway line and by investing in public transport services.

How should that be financed? I believe that the people of the Scottish Borders would accept tolls in and around Edinburgh if they had a viable alternative. The viable alternative must be an improved bus service or a railway line that takes people from the Borders into Edinburgh in reasonable time for a working day.

There would be considerable advantages in looking at the proposed scheme as a way of reducing congestion in Edinburgh. The south of Scotland has been forgotten to a large extent because of the debate on a second Forth bridge. There was no suggestion that an alternative solution to Edinburgh's traffic problems might be a railway line from the Scottish Borders into Edinburgh.

We await the feasibility study. For people in the south of Scotland, improvement in public transport is almost a prerequisite before we can accept road taxation, either in the form of tolls or through an increase in fuel duty.

11:30

**Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP):** A great deal of lip service is paid by unionist politicians to the need for an integrated transport network to serve Scotland's social and economic needs. The reality is that the failure of successive Tory and Labour Governments to invest in infrastructure projects and public transport is leading to a disintegration of our transport links and services. Over the past 10 years the volume of traffic on the roads in Scotland has increased by 25 per cent and it is set to increase by a further 25 per cent in the next 10 years. Despite that, Labour will not prioritise investment in roads programmes. Roads expenditure has been cut savagely since Labour came to power. Current spending plans for motorways and trunk roads are a mere £50 million over the first three years of this Parliament.

We await the long-delayed strategic roads review. I hope that its outcome will be a substantial increase in the budget so that urgently needed projects such as the upgrading of the A77 between Glasgow and Kilmarnock are given the go-ahead. I have little confidence that that will be

the outcome, however, given that a series of pronouncements by Labour politicians suggest that road spending will continue to be low. The prevalent attitude is typified by George Foulkes, the Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley MP, who dismissed roads as an issue during the election campaign and suggested that Labour was happy to leave it to the SNP.

Labour is making two fundamental mistakes in disregarding the fact that, after years of Tory neglect of public transport, increasing numbers of people depend on cars, and the fact that the cuts to road improvement programmes are having a severe impact on road safety and economic development. The situation in Ayrshire illustrates that. The A77 is the main road artery connecting Ayrshire to Glasgow; Mrs McIntosh has already said how dangerous that road is. It is used every day by 37,000 vehicles—that is 7,000 over its capacity. By 2005 an increase of a further 8,000 vehicles a day is expected. The proposed PFI to build a Glasgow south orbital route with a link to the A77 would add another 9,000 vehicles. If the Executive fails to bring forward a plan to upgrade that road immediately, it will be guilty of deliberately neglecting public safety.

In more general terms, the drive to regenerate the Ayrshire economy has been severely hampered by the lack of trunk road development. To the north we need an upgrade of the A737 to connect it to the M8. In the south and west the narrow and aging road network does not help the tourism industry that towns such as Maybole and Girvan need to develop. Girvan has the highest level of unemployment in Scotland, and the lack of a bypass is causing severe structural damage to the town centre of Maybole. In the east, the former mining communities of Cumnock and Doon Valley are suffering high unemployment and rapid depopulation that could be stemmed if cheap and affordable public transport links and better roads were available so that people could travel to areas where there are jobs, such as Ayr and Prestwick.

The greatest economic opportunity for Ayrshire is the development of Prestwick airport now that the fifth freedom rights have been granted. There is a missing link there too—a fast corridor to the M74 is needed to open up the north of England market and to ensure that Prestwick becomes a major European air freight hub as well as a rival to Manchester for passenger services.

I am afraid that the next four years may see little or nothing of that agenda addressed, let alone fulfilled, while Westminster holds the Parliament's purse-strings. Roll on independence.

11:35

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and**

**Leith (Lab):** I listened to Murray Tosh with disbelief. He criticised the fuel escalator. Who started it? He decried motorway tolling. Who introduced it? He bemoaned the crisis in roads funding. Who caused it? As Sarah Boyack said, there was a massive cut in the Scottish Office roads budget before 1997 and the Executive has tried to deal with the uncosted wish list that we inherited and to develop a clear set of priorities for road funding.

**Mr Tosh:** Mr Chisholm said that we introduced tolled motorways. I would be interested to know where there is one in Scotland. I am not aware of any proposal for one.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** Leaving aside the Skye bridge, when the Tories were in power there was only a UK Government and tolls were introduced by it in England. I remember that there were wiser voices in the Conservative party. John MacGregor, as Secretary of State for Transport, said in 1994 that increases in fuel duty and motorway tolls would help people to make more informed choices about the cost of using their cars.

I listened with a different kind of disbelief to Mr MacAskill. Setting aside the fact that the SNP has applied to join the European Federation of Green Parties, which supports a much steeper fuel escalator and many other charges on motorists, I was struck today, as on so many days, by the SNP's wish list of undeliverable spending promises. Before the public spending round later this year, the SNP really must learn not just to promise more money for transport, more money for education, more money for health, more money for everything, without any indication of how it is going to be provided.

The Executive has made an excellent start with £90 million for public transport and initiatives such as quality partnerships for buses. The Parliament should take the opportunity offered by complete control of bus policy in Scotland, which is a very important lever. The Executive has also understood that no matter how much public money we are able to find, it will never be enough. That is why the issue of road user charging has arisen. I know that Mr McLetchie is going to say that we do not need it, that there are other pots of gold. He will tell us that if the City of Edinburgh Council sells Lothian Region Transport it will not need to introduce congestion charging. Lothian Region Transport provides money every year from its surpluses for public transport in Edinburgh and if it is sold off that will be very bad economics—once again the Tory ideology of selling off the family silver—and, in the long run, it will cost the people of Edinburgh more.

I was pleased that the SNP at least acknowledged a role for congestion charging. The Executive has put forward that proposal, but I

emphasise that it will be up to local authorities to decide whether they want to do it. Already Glasgow City Council has indicated that it will not, but it may consider workplace charging. I felt, however, that Mr MacAskill caricatured the Executive's and David Begg's positions on motorway charging. As Sarah Boyack said, extensive research on diversion would be needed. David Begg has also said that he would support motorway charging if the money that it raised was used to develop public transport in the same traffic corridor.

The Executive has a good story to tell on public transport. We should remember that a third of households in Scotland do not have a car. Promoting public transport is in the interests of the poorest and most excluded sections of society. It is good for pensioners—I hope that we will develop concessionary travel schemes—and for women, who are the main users of public transport. It is also good for reducing congestion in cities, which is in everyone's economic interest. The Executive should go on the offensive and sell the policy on public transport.

11:39

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The Scottish Parliament must recognise that Scotland has vast areas that are sparsely populated, with remote communities that are being crucified by the present policies.

It is interesting to note that in Canada, which shares some rural problems with Scotland, a litre of petrol is 20p and car tax is £50. In the Highlands and Islands, petrol is 80p a litre, which is four times as much, and car tax is £150, which is three times as much. Frankly, it would not be surprising if we had another Highland clearance to Canada soon.

It is vital that people understand that, in many areas outside the central belt, the car is a necessity, not a luxury. Although there is public transport in some localities, it is often inconvenient to use, which results in under-utilised buses. What is more polluting than an empty bus? Why should the people who most need their cars have to pay the highest fuel costs in Europe? It does not make sense to them. It is the Executive's responsibility to redress the serious imbalance.

I was surprised to hear George Lyon and Alasdair Morrison state last week that the tourism figures for 1999 were not as bad as had been expected and were no worse than last year. Caledonian MacBrayne's recent figures expose that that was not the case in the north-west of Scotland. They show an overall decline of 20,911 passengers, 4,117 cars and 1,263 commercial vehicles. That comes on top of the fact that last

year's figures were considerably down on those for 1997. Any downturn in the economies of the fragile island communities that are served by CalMac could have devastating consequences, especially as those areas are already deep in recession because of the disastrous state of agriculture, fishing, the tweed industry and tourism.

The key to helping rural communities to help themselves lies in low fuel costs and improved infrastructure. Previous schemes such as the Vattersay causeway, the Scalpay bridge and the Berneray causeway—which were all initiated by Conservative Administrations—have made a huge difference to people's lives, but we must not stop there; we must keep improving access with new and better roads. One such improvement would be a new road link from Tolsta to Ness on the Isle of Lewis. That link was first mooted 150 years ago, but the plan was never carried out. The road would be only nine miles long, but it would link up the whole coastline of the island and would be of great benefit to the local economy.

A major problem that has recently been brought to my attention—I see Alasdair Morrison laughing—and which is particularly expensive is the damage that is being done to rural roads by enormously heavy timber lorries.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have one minute.

**Mr McGrigor:** The obvious solution would be to upgrade rail systems to facilitate the carriage of timber, but that is unfeasible in many areas of the west. The option there is coastal shipping but—I hate to say this—if the coastal shipping industry is ignored for much longer there will be no ships left to turn to and that option will be gone.

“It is the aim of the Government to maintain the social and economic development of the Scottish Highlands and Islands communities through the support of sea transport services in the Highlands and Islands”.

That statement was made in 1997. Where have all the ships gone? The gradual withdrawal of the tariff rebate subsidy has taken freight from coastal shipping and on to the roads. In 1995, the MV St Oran carried nearly 13,000 tonnes of timber, but so far in 1999 she has carried only 400 tonnes, which was cargo for the Argyll and Bute timber transport initiative. The withdrawal of the TRS from timber is immensely damaging to our road systems. The subsidised ferries encourage more haulage to ferry ports, often for just a short crossing. The large and heavily laden lorries increase congestion and can be the cause of major accidents. In contrast, in one recent trip by water, 415 tonnes of timber were carried from Ardrishaig in Argyll to the Mersey, saving 12,000 road miles.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could you finish, please.

**Mr McGrigor:** I am finishing.

The tariff rebate subsidy was discredited because of some fraud, not because it was ineffective. The TRS used to be 40 per cent on timber, coal and building materials, but it is now only 20 per cent and applies only to coal cargoes. A sensible solution would be to reintroduce TRS for timber and other bulk cargoes, such as road salt, which is used by all the Highland councils. Even if the TRS were set at 40 per cent, the bill for the carriage of 200,000 tonnes of timber by sea would be only £1.5 million, and the number of road miles saved from heavy lorries would be in excess of 6 million. Given that Caledonian MacBrayne's subsidy has risen to £17 million, it seems only fair that some consideration be given to the highly adaptable coastal shipping industry before it disappears.

11:45

**Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** I thought that it was a risky strategy for the Tories to lead on this motion this morning. Their defence of it today at least has been commendable—[*Applause.*] However, as Kenny Gibson said, what a brass neck. Before the Scottish Parliament election, the Tories apologised for all their mistakes, but there was no apology this morning to those pensioners who cannot take a bus to church on a Sunday or visit their relatives in hospital at the weekend, and there was no regret for those who cannot get a bus after 6 o'clock at night. There was no word of concern for those who cannot get to work for early shifts within the Renfrewshire area, including Greenock and Inverclyde, which I represent.

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** Will Mr McNeil give way?

**Mr McNeil:** No, we have had enough tosh from the Tories today, and I will have my say.

There has not been a word of regret for low-paid workers who are forced into taxis to take them to work in the morning. The fuel escalator affects those temporary workers in my constituency who are forced to hire buses to take them to and from work. The price of the bus is fixed, so they have to watch their fares increase week after week—the number of passengers has declined because people have been laid off. The price of their transport has doubled.

**Miss Goldie:** Will Mr McNeil give way now?

**Mr McNeil:** No, I am going to press on. I apologise for that, but I need to make a couple of points.

No word of concern was expressed for Mr Dempster, whom I met at Greenock West station this morning, when again the train did not turn up at 6.30. He faxed me to say that he supports our integrated policy. I will tell him that no comfort came from the Conservatives this morning with regard to getting him from Greenock to Motherwell to work. The only comfort in this chamber this morning is the strategy that has been put forward by the Executive.

When I get back to my office I will tell Mr Dempster that I am supporting the amendment and that everyone in this Parliament should do the same, because the only people who can offer a solution to the crisis that we face in our public transport system are the Executive. I hope that the Parliament supports the amendment.

11:48

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** It has become plain to me this morning that, of the many transport issues in Scotland, none can be considered in isolation. Some of the problems—especially road congestion in urban environments—are common to many parts of the world. However, some of our problems are particular to us, especially those that relate to islands and our remote communities.

Just over a year ago, the Government produced a white paper called “Travel Choices for Scotland”, which outlined many of those issues. I think that most of us would agree with much of the analysis in that paper. The figures confirm that Scots travel further and more often now than they did even 10 years ago. The paper also catalogued the failure of the Conservative party’s transport policy. Perhaps that is a misnomer; I should say the Conservative party’s privatisation policy. As has been said, the amount of travel by every form of public transport has fallen.

**Mr Tosh:** Is Linda Fabiani aware that passenger levels on all the rail franchises have risen steadily since 1995? All the franchises anticipate that that trend will continue and they anticipate substantial investment. That is the direct result of railway privatisation.

**Linda Fabiani:** As Kenny Gibson said, Mr Tosh should tell that story to Duncan McNeil and all the people waiting on platforms at 6.30 this morning. If we examine the Scottish statistical surveys, we see that railway privatisation has not been a success.

The western world must face the fact that all transport issues affect the environment. Given the scale of the problem, the Executive’s response to the “Travel Choices for Scotland” white paper is disappointing. “Tackling Congestion” is a fig leaf to conceal another tax-raising measure rather than

an attempt to tackle the problem.

We have been told that rural issues are the most important. I welcome that, as I lived on an island for many years and experienced the problems faced in rural areas. Until now, the focus has been almost exclusively on the central belt; it has been anchored in the distance travelled between Glasgow and Edinburgh. Even in that area, the Executive has run into difficulties. No one supports its ridiculous proposal to apply a toll tax to the M8. It is clear to everyone—apart from the Executive—that the toll tax would simply drive more traffic on to minor roads.

**Mr Kerr:** Will Linda Fabiani give way?

**Linda Fabiani:** No, this is a winding-up speech. Andrew expressed concern for the environment, but I wonder how the people who live along the A71 will feel about their environment being wrecked. The minister may take some comfort from the local authority response to her proposals to tackle city centre congestion in Edinburgh, but she will take no comfort from the slating that the proposals received from her party colleagues in Glasgow.

The SNP position on city centre congestion is clear. Congestion is the responsibility of local authorities; it is a separate issue from motorway and trunk road tolling. It should be clear to the minister that her proposals lack credibility. She has been found out because she is trying to get something for nothing.

**Mr Kerr:** Will Linda Fabiani give way?

**Linda Fabiani:** No. Perhaps Andrew will be lucky the third time that he asks.

Many people would leave their car at home and some would not even buy a car if there were real alternatives. I will not become anecdotal by talking about the problems that I have had in getting to work without the use of my car. Other folk have outlined their problems. We cannot hammer motorists unless they have a viable alternative.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** I agree that this is a serious debate, so will Linda Fabiani explain why the SNP has chosen to settle for glibness—by using the phrase toll tax, for example—which closes down the debate about the options in transport policy? We should all discuss the challenging problems of meeting the pressing needs of the individual, such as those of a mother, and the general needs of the community.

**Linda Fabiani:** We call it a toll tax because it is a toll tax.

At the moment, public transport is not an option for most people. Public transport must be good enough to make people want to get out of their

cars; it must be decent, clean and affordable. Security issues must be addressed and park and ride must be secure. Women must feel that they can leave their car, use public transport and not feel threatened at night when it is dark.

Helen Eadie and Malcolm Chisholm accused the SNP of not having an environmental agenda and remarked on the fact that we had linked up with the Greens in Europe. We have linked up with the Greens, but only on the recognition of our distinctive positions, including on the fuel escalator. That coalition is not a compromise on principle, unlike the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition, which has ditched principle for political expediency.

The minister's press launch for the consultation paper "Tackling Congestion" was a debacle. She was attacked for confirming that she did not propose to ring-fence the funds raised from road charging. The paper states:

"The proposed legislation will not, therefore, restrict expenditure entirely to transport-related matters."

We had a memorable U-turn.

**Mr Kerr:** Will Linda Fabiani give way?

**Linda Fabiani:** Yes; I said that I would probably give way the third time.

**Mr Kerr:** The SNP spent all summer running away from principles and policies on road user charging. How would it pay for the infrastructure of the Scottish transport network, given that it would not increase the fuel duty escalator, would not charge on roads and would leave city centre congestion to local authorities? Where is the SNP's environmental and financial commitment to this Parliament's responsibility to produce an integrated transport policy?

**Linda Fabiani:** Scotland has been paying through the nose for years. The SNP does not believe that the answer to everything is to cut income tax and impose hidden taxes on consumers.

I look forward to finding out from next year's bill whether the funds raised will be ring-fenced. The minister's excuse for her U-turn—she has allowed it to stand on record—was that she was badly advised by her civil servants. That excuse is an unfortunate precedent so early in the Executive's life.

**Sarah Boyack:** With respect, I wish it to be clear that I made no such statement.

**Linda Fabiani:** Are you saying that it was not the civil servants who made the mistake?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Address your remarks through the chair, please, and wind up.

**Linda Fabiani:** I am sorry, Presiding Officer. Will

the minister state here and now that it was not the civil servants who got it wrong, but the Executive?

**Sarah Boyack:** Ms Fabiani should not believe everything that she reads in the press. If it has quotation marks around it, it is my statement.

**Linda Fabiani:** It would have been nice if Sarah Boyack had refuted that sooner.

We have the opportunity in this Parliament to discuss, through the Transport and the Environment Committee, all aspects of Scottish transport and the environment. As the minister said, we have the opportunity for realistic and honest debate, which will result in the best solution for Scotland. The SNP would welcome that and, as a member of that committee, I look forward to discussing the responses to the Executive's consultation paper. I suspect that the Executive will find that everyone is out of step, except our Sarah, so I hope that our Sarah is willing to make some more U-turns. Andy told us that we have a listening Government in the UK and in Scotland. Along with many others, I await the proof of that bold statement in relation to transport and the environment.

11:58

**David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con):** I welcome the fact that the debate has given the Parliament an opportunity to discuss some of the big issues in transport policy in Scotland and has given members from all parties the opportunity to raise local concerns. That balance has been welcome.

The debate has confirmed that on the big picture no amount of rhetoric can hide the fact that Labour does not give transport the priority that it deserves. Since it came to power, Labour at Westminster has pursued a vendetta against the motorist. The road user is the fall guy for levying taxation by stealth. It is intent on taxing ordinary people off the road, putting business costs up and thereby damaging job prospects. Gordon Brown has imposed the highest fuel taxes in history and we have the most expensive petrol and diesel in Europe—£17 out of every £20 spent on fuel is tax. Labour has put its foot on the fuel escalator since coming to power.

Our hauliers have been hit particularly hard by fuel taxes and by vehicle excise duty, which stands at 11 times the level that applies in France. Fuel taxes are a blunt instrument, hitting particularly hard people who live in fragile rural communities where the car is a necessity, not a luxury. I welcome the fact that members from all parties have expressed concern about that. I welcome even the Liberal Democrats' petition to the chancellor as one way of addressing the issue. It is a conversion on the Damascus road, given that their earlier stated policies would have pushed

up fuel prices for road users in Scotland far more than even this Government has done.

**Tavish Scott:** Is David McLetchie aware that the Liberal Democrat members of the Westminster Parliament voted against the fuel tax escalator at every opportunity when it came up as a budget measure? Their principal argument was that it would harm rural areas unless compensating measures were introduced. That is the position, and David McLetchie should try to get it right.

**David McLetchie:** I accept that that is the Liberal Democrats' voting record, but their policy is to favour energy and carbon taxes that would have a far more severe impact than the fuel escalator. That is the Liberal Democrats' national policy and Tavish Scott is saddled with it. There is no point in trying to write it off in this chamber by casting a few votes against an alternative tax policy.

The whole Government transport policy is built on a lie. Over the lifetime of this Parliament, Labour's motoring taxes will add an extra £9 billion to the motorists' tax bill in the United Kingdom.

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab)** rose—

**David McLetchie:** I will give way after I have had a chance to develop this point.

The three budgets so far have added more than £150 a year to the fuel tax bill of every driver in Britain. However, despite those extra taxes, the Centre for Economics and Business Research estimates that the increases will result in reductions of less than 0.5 per cent in car usage and carbon dioxide emissions. Those taxes have nothing to do with helping the environment. They are Labour stealth taxes to raise more money for the chancellor's election war chest.

It is not as if the extra money that is raised through taxes from motorists and other road users goes towards improving the transport system.

**Bristow Muldoon** rose—

**David McLetchie:** I will give way in a moment.

In the United Kingdom as a whole, of the £32 billion that the Government raised from motoring taxes last year, less than one fifth went back into the transport network. That has led to Labour's slashing the roads budget.

**Bristow Muldoon:** Mr McLetchie has been critical of the fuel price escalator and of our proposals for road charging, yet he wishes to spend more on roads. Can he detail which public services he would cut or which taxes he would raise to pay the bill?

**David McLetchie:** Yes. Our motion says quite clearly what we should do. The United Kingdom Government—because we need a unionist transport policy that reflects Scotland's needs as

part of the United Kingdom—should increase expenditure and allocate a higher proportion of the total taxes already raised from motorists and road users to the transport budget. By dint of the application of the Barnett formula, that would ensure an increase in the Scottish block, which the Minister for Transport and the Environment could use to meet Scotland's transport priorities. It is as simple as that. If the Labour party at national level were not failing on the big-picture issues—failing to tackle soaring welfare bills in the budget—there would be more finance to tackle Scotland's basic transport needs.

The Conservative party is committed to ending the annual automatic fuel duty escalator. We say that enough is enough. The Scottish Executive should use its influence and tell the chancellor to press the emergency stop button on the escalator before he does more damage to our economy. As I said in response to an earlier question, we think that the chancellor should be told to give transport spending as a whole far higher priority in the public spending round than it receives at present. However, that does not appear to be the Scottish Executive's intention.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**David McLetchie:** No, I will move on before coming back to the member.

Far from doing either of the things that I have suggested, the Executive intends to exacerbate the situation by introducing tolls, taxes and charges on Scotland's motorists and road users. The Executive's consultation paper proposes tolls for travelling on our motorways—not just on our new roads—and charging people for using roads that their taxes have already paid for. It also proposes tolls for entering our cities and new taxes for parking at places of work.

**Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)** rose—

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**David McLetchie:** I will give way to Mr Macintosh first.

**Mr Macintosh:** Will Mr McLetchie answer Bristow Muldoon's question? If the Conservatives intend to make transport a priority, which public services would they cut? They cannot simply take the money from England, or promote one priority without demoting another. Which public services would pay—welfare and social services, education or the health service?

**David McLetchie:** I have already answered the question. If the United Kingdom as a whole gives higher priority to transport in overall public spending, additional resources will be available

here in Scotland.

**Tricia Marwick** rose—

**David McLetchie:** I have taken one intervention and will give way to the member in a moment.

The new taxes that the Executive is selling are based on a lie. It is telling us that they are intended to reduce congestion and that there is a good environmental case to be made for them. That is not true. Even the SNP has seen through that as far as motorway tolls are concerned. The taxes have nothing to do with relieving congestion. The Government's transport adviser, Mr David Begg, said in an article in *Scotland on Sunday* of 27 June that

"the argument for motorway tolling is primarily a financial one: there is little or no money to fund the roads programme in Scotland."

Unfortunately, the SNP has not seen through the Executive's arguments on tolls to enter our cities and taxes on workplace parking. I find it deeply depressing that today SNP members not only failed to press the Executive on those points, but seemed to want to return to a neanderthal nationalising policy—if their attacks on privatisation and deregulation of rail and buses are anything to go by. The contempt that they showed for what Mr Souter has achieved in building Stagecoach into one of Scotland's most successful companies will do nothing to increase their election campaign funds for next year.

**Mr MacAskill:** How does the member propose that by 2005 Scottish cities should meet the air quality directives and address the problem of environmental pollution that we are suffering in urban areas?

**David McLetchie:** There is no proof that higher taxes to enter our cities will achieve that. Sensible physical traffic management measures, the development of alternatives to the car and the development of park-and-ride schemes are what is needed. I was interested to hear one member's comments on park-and-ride schemes. We in Edinburgh have been waiting years for such schemes. While Mr Begg has been wasting millions on consultancy fees and reports, the park-and-ride schemes have lain in abeyance. That is the reality in this city.

The Executive's policy of city entry charges is built on a lie. Experiments that have been carried out in cities such as Leicester have suggested that the rate would have to be set at £8 per day before it had any effect. I find it hard to believe that even this Executive is suggesting charges at that level.

Workplace parking falls into the same category. We are told in the paper on congestion that employees enjoy free parking. That is nonsense. Workplace parking is already taxed through the

business rates system. That amounts to £1,000 per annum on rateable value in cities such as Edinburgh. People in Edinburgh are already paying more than £500 per parking space—what will an extra £100 do to reduce congestion? Nothing, I suggest. In the same *Scotland on Sunday* article that I quoted earlier, Mr Begg said that

"over the last twenty years there has been no change in rush hour traffic volumes into Edinburgh".

If he does not believe that the volume of rush-hour congestion is increasing in Edinburgh, why are these new taxes being presented as necessary and inevitable?

We need to improve public transport and provide alternatives. We do not need to bleed the motorist dry to do so. The Executive is trying to con the public into believing that its taxes will relieve congestion, to disguise the fact that transport is so low on its priorities list that it will not fund improvements to our system without extra tax revenues. That is why transport should have a higher UK priority and why I want Lothian Region Transport to be sold off to fund the improvements that are set out in the Government's local transport strategy. Malcolm Chisholm also talked about improvements in local transport, but our proposal would cause the improvements to be evident in a few years, not the 60 years that Malcolm's dividend cheque drip feed would mean.

I will finish my speech now as I am aware of the pressure of time. I am sorry that I have been unable to let Tricia Marwick ask her question.

Transport is a low priority for this Government. As Murray Tosh said in his opening speech, the question is one of balance. The balance has gone too far against the motorist, the haulier and other road users. It is time to correct the balance, to give transport its fair share of national resources. Our motion would ensure that, and I ask members to support it.

12:11

**Sarah Boyack:** I would like to make a quick point before I start. Mr Tosh asked me to correct a typographical error in my speech notes, and I am happy to do so: the Conservative party was in power for 18 years, not 20. There were times when it felt like a lifetime—was it really only 18 years?

There is consensus in the Parliament. We all want a high-quality road network and a world-class public transport system. We all recognise that we need different approaches for the urban and rural parts of Scotland. That consensus is promising. The problem is that people will not address the issues of how we will pay for transport investment and how we can tackle traffic congestion.

I have spent all summer listening to Kenny MacAskill and Linda Fabiani avoid addressing the issues in our "Tackling Congestion" paper. Today, we finally had a ringing endorsement from them for congestion charges, even if it sounded a bit thin after the attacks during the summer.

The SNP has always pretended to be all things to all voters. Linda Fabiani's support for the SNP joining the Green grouping in the European Parliament sounded hollow, particularly in the context of Kenny MacAskill's comments about opposing landfill tax. We have a problem with how we can meet our environmental commitments. We need a responsible debate on the problem.

The SNP is in favour of road pricing; I am glad that SNP members have made a commitment to it today. The party supported city centre charging schemes in its 1999 manifesto.

**Mr MacAskill:** On a point of order. An allegation has been made, that I said that I supported road pricing. I did not say that. I would like Sarah Boyack to withdraw her remark.

**Sarah Boyack:** I was talking about congestion charging. You said that you supported it in city centres. Is that correct?

**Mr MacAskill:** Yes.

**Sarah Boyack:** So you support some form of road pricing, as long as it is congestion charging and is left to the local authorities. That is the approach that is suggested in our consultation paper. I look forward to your endorsement of that suggestion and any other helpful suggestions on how the proposal can be implemented.

The SNP has dodged transport issues for months. You have historically argued for highly focused road pricing and your transport spokesperson—

**Phil Gallie:** On a point of order. Repeatedly, the minister, who is reading from a typed speech, says "you". It is one thing when mere back benchers like me use the term, but it is atrocious that a minister should do so.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sure that the minister will take your point.

**Sarah Boyack:** I do. When I refer to the Opposition parties, I will do so explicitly. Thank you for that point of order, Mr Gallie.

On 28 August, the SNP transport spokesperson Stewart Hosie said that there might be some arguments for motorway tolls. The SNP conference in September 1998 endorsed a motion that recognised that certain car pricing schemes might provide the revenue needed to develop alternatives—the conference supported focused road pricing to help develop public transport alternatives. Those comments were welcome, and

I welcome the SNP to the serious debate about congestion in our cities.

Despite those policies, the SNP is also in favour of increasing income tax. We have one of the lowest rates of income tax in Europe and one of the lowest rates of corporation tax. Money for investment in transport has to come from somewhere. Earlier this year, Alasdair Morgan, during the 24 hours for which he was the SNP's transport spokesperson, said that he wanted an extra 1p on income tax to go towards investment in roads. That statement was withdrawn within 24 hours.

The SNP has not had a consistent or coherent approach to transport investment in Scotland. I will be interested to find out whether the SNP will support the Conservative party's motion, which is a thoroughly confused one. It welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment to reducing vehicle emissions, yet does not say how that could be achieved. John Young asked us to set the rest of the world an example. That is the point of the Executive's policy.

The Tories recognise the importance to Scotland of our transport links by road, rail, sea and air, but abdicate all responsibility to the UK Government. The point of having a Scottish Parliament is that we should be able to make choices about where to invest the money that we receive in the block grant. As David McLetchie said, the Tories propose a unionist transport approach. Scotland deserves better. We need to set our transport policies in Scotland, while playing a full part in the UK.

The Tories promise new investment without the slightest idea of how they will pay for it. They promised the M74 contract; we have committed £25 million a year to it for the next 30 years. We are paying for investment in the road system and in public transport. Our new public transport fund and our new rural transport fund are further evidence of our commitment to invest in transport.

The Tories promise more money for maintenance, but cut maintenance spend to unprecedentedly low levels when they were in power. Roads are important for cars, buses and lorries and they should be a key part of any transport strategy for Scotland.

We have embarked on a major consultation on road charging. I want an opportunity to reflect on all the views received when the consultation process ends in two weeks. I encourage both the Opposition parties to respond. I would like the detailed comments that they have made today to be on paper, so that they can be properly considered. I have set up a sub-committee of the national transport forum, which is not a group of yes-men. It is made up of people, some of whom

support our policies and some of whom have reservations, who will draw together the comments that have been submitted so that we can take forward a policy that people will support.

This Government is determined to build an integrated transport system that meets Scotland's economic and social needs but does not threaten our health or our environment. That will require innovative solutions. During the summer, I talked to the Confederation of British Industry, the Road Haulage Association, the Automobile Association, the Royal Automobile Club and many local authorities to work out ways in which we can work in partnership and build consensus.

I am happy to take on board Kenny Gibson's comments about social inclusion and buses. Our objective in bringing forward an integrated transport bill with legislation on buses is to address frequency, timetables, through-ticketing, access and the quality of buses. There are good examples of partnerships in action, but we must broaden them and give local authorities a statutory basis for working with transport operators.

That is what is critical about our policy, and we hope to work with people to deliver it. It will require commitment from central and local government. We have to tackle our inherited transport problems of under-investment, a second-class public transport system and polluted cities. Those will be our priorities.

We need to recognise the diversity of Scotland. I appreciated listening to the speeches by Jamie McGrigor, Euan Robson, David Mundell and John Munro. They are right to call for an integrated approach in rural areas. It is important that we acknowledge that most people in rural areas need to use their cars. That is why we have supported rural petrol stations and why I am anticipating the second Office of Fair Trading report on fuel pricing. We want to reflect on those matters.

I have been talking with councils in the Highlands and Islands, Argyll and Bute and the Western Isles. We need to work together, using our rural transport fund, to deliver for people in rural areas. However, it must be an integrated approach, and I welcome the comments about coastal shipping and transporting timber. I have been working with John Home Robertson on our review of the freight facilities grant, to see whether it can be extended to shipping. Those are important issues that we will reflect on as the Executive.

Scottish ministers, the Parliament, local authorities, regional partnerships, transport operators, voluntary groups and the UK Government must all work together in partnership. It is about balance, not about focusing on the needs of one group of transport users.

Mr McLetchie, we do not see motorists as being a separate group in society. Motorists use a whole range of public services. We need to take their views into account as much as those of anyone else. We want an integrated approach to our road, rail and bus networks, which tackles local problems, including local congestion. That is a broad approach. It is a transport policy that embraces rather than excludes, offers people choice where there is no choice at present, and seeks to protect our environment while ensuring economic prosperity and social inclusion.

I move amendment S1M-151.2, to leave out from 'expresses concern' to end and insert:

'commends the efforts the Scottish Executive is making to tackle the consequences of eighteen years of Conservative transport policies and reverse the resulting legacy of under investment, rising congestion and environmental degradation, and calls upon the Scottish Executive to continue to work to deliver a sustainable, effective and integrated transport system through in particular the Programme of Government commitments on investing in public transport, promoting a national transport timetable and bringing forward a Transport Bill in early 2000 whilst reflecting the diverse transport needs of all Scotland's people, in particular those living in rural area, and by so doing to take the decisions required to deliver, working with others, an integrated transport system fit for the 21st century.'

## Business Motion

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson):** The next item of business is consideration of a business motion in the name of Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a revised business programme.

12:22

**The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe):** The motion sets out the business for next week and the provisional business for the following week.

In the afternoon of Wednesday 22 September, there will be a debate on an Executive motion on tourism. That will be followed by any motions lodged by the Parliamentary Bureau in respect of Scottish statutory instruments, which will be taken without debate, and any procedural motions that are to be considered by the Parliament. Decision time will take place at 5 pm. After decision time there will be a members' business debate on motion S1M-126 on Stobhill Hospital, in the name of Mr Paul Martin.

On Thursday 23 September, business will begin at 9.30 am with a debate on an Executive motion on crime prevention. That debate replaces the debate on a manufacturing and industrial strategy for Scotland that was announced as provisional business last week, which will now take place on 29 September. On conclusion of the debate on crime prevention, I will move a further business motion for the ensuing weeks.

The afternoon will start with question time at 2.30 pm, followed by open question time at 3 pm and a debate on an Executive motion on the voluntary sector at 3.15 pm. That will be followed by any motions lodged by the Parliamentary Bureau on SSIs, which are to be taken without debate. Decision time will take place at 5 pm, and on this occasion there will be no members' business.

The business for the following week is, as always, provisional. However, every attempt will be made to hold to the announced business.

On Wednesday 29 September, it is proposed that the substantive business should be a debate on an Executive motion on a manufacturing and industrial strategy for Scotland. Decision time will take place at 5 pm, followed by a members' debate on a subject that is yet to be announced.

On Thursday 30 September, the first item of business will be a non-Executive business debate on a motion from the Scottish National party; the topic is yet to be announced. Immediately before lunch, I will move a further business motion.

The afternoon will begin with question time, followed by open question time at 3 pm. That will be followed by the debate on stage 1 of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Bill and the financial resolution required in relation to the bill. On both days, provision will be made to enable the Parliament to consider any motions lodged by the Parliamentary Bureau in respect of SSIs and other procedural motions required to be considered by the Parliament. Decision time will take place at 5 pm, followed by a members' business debate on a subject that is yet to be announced.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 22 September 1999

2.30 pm Debate on an Executive Motion on Tourism

followed by Parliamentary Bureau motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business: Debate on the subject of motion S1M-126 Paul Martin – Stobhill Hospital (for text of motion, see Section F of Business Bulletin for Monday 13 September 1999)

Thursday 23 September 1999

9.30 am Debate on an Executive Motion on Crime Prevention

followed by, no later than 12.20 pm Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.00 pm Open Question Time

followed by, no later than 3.15 pm Debate on an Executive Motion on the Voluntary Sector

followed by Other Parliamentary Bureau motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Wednesday 29 September 1999

2.30 pm Debate on an Executive Motion on a Manufacturing and Industrial Strategy for Scotland

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 30 September 1999

9.30 am Non-Executive Business: Debate on a Motion by the Scottish National Party

followed by, no later than 12.20 pm Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.00 pm Open Question Time

followed by, no

later than 3.15 pm Stage 1 Debate on the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Bill

followed by Motion on a Financial Resolution required in relation to the provisions of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Bill

followed by Other Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is no amendment to the motion, nor any indication that anyone wishes to speak on it.

The question is, that motion S1M-152, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

*Question, That the meeting be now adjourned until 2.10 pm today, put and agreed to.—[Mr McCabe.]*

*Meeting adjourned at 12:26.*

14:10

*On resuming—*

## Continental Tyres

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** As announced this morning, the first item of business is the emergency debate on motion S1M-158 in the name of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton on the subject of parity of treatment by Continental Tyres. There is also an amendment to that motion. Lord James, you have three minutes to move the motion.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** Motion S1M-158 arises from a meeting yesterday that MSPs had with employees of Continental Tyres. That meeting was attended by Mary Mulligan, Pauline McNeill and Bristow Muldoon from the Scottish Labour party; by Margo MacDonald, Fiona Hyslop and Lloyd Quinan from the Scottish National party; by Nick Johnston and me from the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party; by Tommy Sheridan from the Scottish Socialist party; and by Robin Harper from the Green party. Apologies were received from Margaret Smith. As we can see, there was cross-party representation at the meeting.

The employees made it clear to us that they would press for the best redundancy package available. They pointed out that they have worked flat out; that they have had to work more hours for the same pay; that their rates of pay have been reduced; and that they had forgone their annual pay rise. Broadly speaking, there is a shortfall of 40 per cent between the offer to the Scottish work force of 800 employees and the offer that was given a few years earlier to the Irish work force at Semperit.

I submit that to offer the Scottish work force 40 per cent less than comparable Irish employees is neither generous nor reasonable. In the past six months, Continental has recorded massive profits that represent a 30 per cent increase on the previous record year, so the company is in a position to give equivalent treatment to the Scottish employees.

Tomorrow, Dr Holzbach, who is representing the company, will visit the factory for last-minute negotiations on the closure package. In such circumstances, it is reasonable for the Parliament to be able to express a view. Mr Henry McLeish has lodged an amendment to my motion. I recommend that the Parliament accepts the amendment because it urges the company—as Mr McLeish has—to reach a “fair and equitable settlement”. I interpret the phrase “fair and equitable” to mean parity of treatment, broadly speaking. I am not interested in this or that

detail—a 40 per cent differential is far too great.

Mr McLeish also makes it clear in the amendment that he will meet Dr Holzbach tomorrow. If his amendment to the motion is passed, he will be able to present Dr Holzbach with the Parliament's findings, which I hope will provide better redundancy terms for the employees of Continental.

I move,

That the Parliament calls upon the Scottish Executive to take up with the Continental Tyre Company the need to give their Scottish employees parity of treatment by offering them an equivalent package to that offered to and received by their former employees in Semperit in Ireland, in view of the impending visit on Friday to Newbridge of Dr Holzbach, senior executive member of the Continental Tyre Company.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Henry McLeish to move the amendment.

**The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish):** I move amendment S1M-158.1, to leave out "calls" to end and insert

"notes that any financial settlement for workers at the Continental Tyre Company is a matter for negotiation between their Trade Union representatives and the company; notes that the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning has urged the company to reach a fair and equitable settlement; notes that negotiations are in progress; hopes that they will reach a quick and positive outcome which takes account of all the relevant circumstances; and notes that the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning will bring this motion to the attention of the Company when he meets them on Friday 17 September."

**The Presiding Officer:** I will call Mr McLeish to wind up the debate at 14:25.

14:13

**Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** I welcome the opportunity to debate Continental's decision to close the Newbridge tyre operation in my constituency at a cost of 774 jobs. Over the past few months, I have met representatives of the work force on many occasions and, having spoken to them again today, I know that they, too, welcome the debate and the support that they have received from MSPs on all sides of the Parliament.

Members from all political parties have signalled their support for Continental workers, which sends a strong message to Continental that the Parliament and the parties in it are determined to ensure that Continental workers are treated fairly. I will take that message into the meeting that I—as the local MSP—will have tomorrow with Dr Holzbach, one of Continental's senior German management.

Continental has taken a commercial decision to move out of Scotland into areas such as eastern Europe, where operating costs are cheaper. The

company has turned its back on workers who have jumped through hoops for it and who have accepted redundancies, new shift patterns and loss of pay over the past year to save their jobs.

Continental has turned its back on a skilled work force that produces a quality product. It has turned its back on a work force that was in the process of turning losses of £8 million last year into a profit this year. Producing 14,000 tyres each day, the Continental plant at Newbridge would this year have finished in the black. That turnaround would have been due to the work force's efforts.

At the time of the ministerial statement, I asked Mr McLeish what action the Executive was taking to make the point to the company that the work force should be dealt with fairly. I believe that his response on that occasion, the conversation that we have had today and the amendment that the Executive has lodged, give a clear signal that the minister and his deputy have been making representations in that regard and that Mr McLeish will continue to do so tomorrow.

Continental has made much of the worsening worldwide tyre market and the strong pound. Members should be in no doubt that its decision to abandon Newbridge and its Scottish work force is because it can make greater profits by moving from the diverse, small, skilled plant at Newbridge to large purpose-built plants in eastern Europe or Portugal, where EU grants are the sweetest. A visit to Continental's website tells us about the company's profits as of 12 August 1999:

"Contrary to the trend in the tyre industry the Continental Corporation is reporting substantial gains in sales and earnings. The first half of 1999 sales leaped by 54 per cent and their earnings jumped 38 per cent."

Passenger tyre sales are up 10 per cent; commercial vehicle tyre sales are up 22 per cent; and so it goes on.

Meanwhile, Continental is offering its Scottish workers less of a settlement than was offered to Irish employees in 1996. There is no justification for that. The Newbridge workers should at least have parity with the Irish work force. An extension of what is on offer to the Scots to bring them into line would cost between £4 million and £5 million. Given the commitment shown by the workers and the level of profit that Continental continues to make, I believe that it should be prepared to pay that price.

**The Presiding Officer:** Wind up now, please.

**Mrs Smith:** The Executive and this Parliament should put pressure on Continental to pay that price.

14:17

**Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab):** There is

no question but that the workers at Continental have done everything in their power to enable them to continue in employment. Unfortunately, they have been unsuccessful. My main concern is to ensure that Continental, which has taken the decision to pull out of Newbridge and leave the people with no jobs, is made to recompense those workers as strongly as possible.

I welcome tomorrow's meeting between the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and Dr Holzbach. I am more than certain that the minister will press the claim of the workers and ensure that the deal that they get is the best one possible. I am, therefore, more than happy to support the amendment.

14:18

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** Members will be aware that I have taken up the interests of my constituents who are workers at the Continental plant. The minister may wish that I had not, but that is our duty in this Parliament.

By supporting this motion, the Parliament can stand shoulder to shoulder with the Continental workers in their fight for a fair deal from the general management. A Scottish Continental worker facing redundancy is worth no less than an Irish worker—and certainly not 40 per cent less.

In a number of discussions that I have had with the work force, the management and the unions, I have been struck by their compelling case. Workers have taken a wage freeze, increased hours and productivity, and changed their shift patterns on a number of occasions to make the survival package work—and it was working. Members should be aware that, recently, high-performing machinery has been removed from the plant in the face of a slump in demand. In the past three months, 120 tyre moulds have been removed. How does that square with a market downturn? They are obviously needed somewhere.

I understand that Ford is now refusing Continental tyres made in eastern Europe as those plants do not have the assurances of the International Standards Organisation that Newbridge can guarantee. As Margaret Smith said, Continental made substantial profits recently. It has invested £20 million in sponsoring the Champions League to promote its good name and reputation. That reputation is endangered by its refusal to give its Scottish workers a fair deal and the respect due for the hard work and commitment they have shown.

If we are talking about champions, this Parliament must champion Scottish workers. Independent Ireland has tough labour laws; we do not have those powers but we can lend our

support.

The Parliament, in calling for ministers to take this message to Dr Holzbach, can show a sense of strength and solidarity with the Continental workers. They most certainly deserve our support and I am pleased that the minister's amendment gives them that.

14:20

**Mr Nick Johnston (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** At yesterday's meeting, the Continental workers showed that they are brave and determined people who have finally accepted their fate; they are doomed.

I am pleased that the minister will call for equity of treatment between Ireland and Scotland, but we need to go further. Once the issue of the redundancy payments is settled, we must examine what will happen next. I will request that the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee speak to a representative number of the workers at Newbridge to get their views on the help that they are being offered. At first examination, the help does not seem to meet entirely the work force's needs. The workers at Continental have specific skills; they need retraining and they need it quickly.

As Fiona said, tyre moulds have been removed to Romania and Ford has rejected the tyres made in that country on grounds of quality. Now it appears that production may have to continue on certain models to allow Continental to fulfil its contract with Ford. That means that the workers still do not know when their jobs will cease to exist, which is very disturbing for people who have children to feed and mortgages to pay.

Much has been trumpeted about the number of jobs that were created by the task force in Haddington. What was the quality of those jobs and what were the rates of pay? The Continental workers are highly paid and skilled and they should not be asked to work for minimum rates in call centres.

Finally, I refer to my remarks to Mr McLeish regarding the redevelopment of the site and the apparent difficulties with the Civil Aviation Authority.

I support the motion.

14:21

**Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP):** I add my congratulations to the minister on addressing this issue just in time. I sincerely hope that he will tell the gentleman who will arrive from Germany exactly what we feel about the decisions that have been made.

I accept that the closure is a done deal, but I will take members forward, if I may. As a member of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, along with Nick, I am concerned that although the training programme is perhaps better than we first feared, it might have been put in place a bit earlier. Margaret Smith referred to the number of times she has spoken with the management over a considerable period of time. Why, then, was the local enterprise company not aware that there was a possibility that the employment prospects at Newbridge would change? If it had been aware of that, we would not have had 300 blokes waiting to go on a forklift truck driving course knowing that the likelihood of still being employed at Newbridge while the course was open to them was very low indeed.

I regret the fact that the jobs are to be lost and I regret the circumstances in which that will happen. I sincerely hope that the minister will get the money that the blokes are due. However, I also hope that we will learn something from this and that the rapid response unit, which the minister promised to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, will be put into effect pronto.

**The Presiding Officer:** Lloyd Quinan, you have two minutes.

14:23

**Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome Henry McLeish's amendment. I also welcome the opportunity to have cross-party agreement to support the workers at Continental.

The Continental situation reminds me of what happened at the Caterpillar plant in Tannochside, Lanarkshire in 1987. Unfortunately, the Government of the day did not fight for the rights of the workers and this Parliament was not in existence to do so. In light of the bad press that the Parliament has had during the past few weeks, it is marvellous that we are able to show together that we are prepared to fight for industrial workers in Scotland. That alone makes the Parliament worth while.

A warning about Continental and its behaviour across the world was given on Monday to the Trades Union Congress. The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations representative warned the congress that Continental, in all cases, attempts to get away with the minimum payment.

I will remind members of what the Irish workers were able to achieve with the support of their Government. Let us hope that pressure from here will have the same effect on Continental. The Irish workers got five weeks' pay per year of service, plus their statutory entitlement. The Irish statutory entitlement is half a week per year, but with the

strength of the labour courts the Irish workers were able to achieve more. On top of that, a further lump sum of a 3 per cent increase over a three-year period was paid. We should be looking for nothing less than that. I support the amendment.

14:25

**The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish):** I want to thank colleagues for their constructive contributions to this brief debate. I also want to echo the sentiments expressed by Margo MacDonald and Nick Johnston about the need for the existing package to unfold to the benefit of the work force. If there are any concerns whatever, members should come directly to me. I will tackle any genuine concerns that the local MSP or others have.

I want to thank Lord James for his comments, which were, as usual, courteous. We have tried to work in such a way as to lodge an amendment that all members can support. Members in all quarters are agreed that this is an issue on which we should not be divided. We seek the best for the work force at the plant and it would send a powerful message if that were the result of our deliberations.

I have listened with great care to what members have said. I need hardly do so, but I stress that I share the widely expressed concerns for the future of the Scottish employees of Continental. I have already expressed my strongest sympathy for the work force and their families and I have made it clear that the Scottish Executive will provide or endorse whatever support is appropriate for the work force. However, as I said in my statement on 1 September:

"It is not within the power of the Executive or this Parliament to deliver on redundancy packages." —[*Official Report, 1 September 1999; Vol 2, c 15.*]

It is not for the Scottish Executive to seek to negotiate the terms of redundancy packages. That is clearly a matter for the unions. I have been in close contact with the union officials, in particular Harry Donaldson of the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, on many occasions, most recently at 11 o'clock today. The union officials are aware of my—and the Parliament's—support for their efforts. I respect their judgment and competence and we wish them every success in achieving an equitable outcome. As Margaret Smith, the local MSP, said, there are meetings tomorrow with the work force, the task group, the local MSP and me.

While I understand the concerns that lie behind the demand for parity of treatment, we must recognise that different countries, such as

Germany and Ireland, have different labour laws and that different circumstances apply. Those factors have a clear impact on redundancy packages, which are negotiated. It is not always appropriate to draw comparisons. However, we have urged the company to provide employees with the most generous redundancy package possible. That is the sentiment of this Parliament and we reinforce that again today. We have not budged from that position.

When my colleague, Nicol Stephen, visited Continental's management in Hanover a few weeks ago, he emphasised the importance that we place on the settlement package for the work force and on full co-operation with the action team on retraining for new employment. As a result of that meeting, Dr Holzbach is visiting the Newbridge plant tomorrow. I will meet him during the day to continue discussions.

In the spirit of my amendment, the motion that we approve today will be presented to Dr Holzbach to show our sense of purpose and unity and to reflect the fact that we want the best possible package to emerge. However, eventually, it is up to the trades unions and the company to deliver on that.

We have also stressed the importance of carrying out an economic and financial appraisal quickly to establish future options for the plant. That, too, has been agreed.

We will continue to support the efforts being made by so many agencies to ensure the best possible outcome for the workers at Newbridge. I hope that we can constructively channel the concern and commitment of everyone involved, including that of members here today, to achieve that goal.

In the spirit of co-operation and solidarity, it is vital for this Parliament at times to speak to the rest of Scotland with one voice. We are doing that today. I hope that colleagues will accept the amendment, which I discussed earlier with Lord James and which represents the best way forward. Let us ensure that we get the best deal for the workers. That is what tomorrow is all about.

**The Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that under standing orders, the decision on the motion and the amendment will be made at decision time at 5 o'clock.

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Stracathro Hospital

**1. Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive which services and staff posts have been withdrawn from or reduced in Stracathro hospital over the past five years and what steps are being taken to ensure the future of Stracathro hospital and the services it provides. (S1O-297)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon):** Details of individual staff changes and their impact on services are available only from Tayside University Hospitals NHS Trust, which employs the staff concerned. I have asked the trust to write directly to Mr Welsh with those details. As Mr Welsh will be aware, Tayside Health Board is currently conducting a review of acute services across Tayside, which is due to be completed later this year. The services provided at Stracathro hospital are part of that review.

**Mr Welsh:** Is the minister aware of the enormous public concern over the future of Stracathro hospital? Can she explain why mixed orthopaedic and general surgical wards have been created against professional advice and why administrative delays have prevented the return of a consultant at a time of staff shortages? Why are wards threatened with closure, pre-empting the acute services review? Will she take a personal interest in this situation to ensure that information is made available to the public and that a fair and just solution is introduced to safeguard Stracathro hospital?

**Susan Deacon:** I am aware of local concern and of the specific issues regarding local decisions that Mr Welsh raises. I am concerned that there is a great deal of confusion around the issue of Stracathro hospital and that prolonged speculation is causing concern among staff and patients in the Angus area. I have met Mr Welsh and Mr Swinney to discuss the issue. I stress that I am as keen as anyone to ensure that that uncertainty does not continue. I have asked health department officials to discuss with Tayside Health Board its plans for acute services locally and to make plain the need for a clear timetable and proper public consultation throughout that process.

#### Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee

**2. Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive, if it decides to abolish the Scottish joint negotiating committee, what mechanism it intends to use to achieve the abolition. (S1O-306)

**The Minister for Children and Education (Mr Sam Galbraith):** Abolition of the Scottish joint negotiating committee would require repeal of the relevant sections of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 as amended.

**Ms White:** I fully understand about the legislation, but does the minister agree that abolition of the SJNC, which the SNP opposes, will not solve the current crisis in the negotiations over teachers' pay and conditions? It would take several months to get the necessary legislation through Parliament, as the minister said, but in the meantime there would be chaos in our schools. Is the minister happy to preside over that, or will he instead outline to the Parliament a more constructive approach to settling the dispute, such as making more money available to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in order to allow COSLA to return to the negotiating table?

**Mr Galbraith:** I hear the points that the lady raises. I made it clear from the earliest days that I wished those negotiations to deliver a settlement. If that does not happen, the future of the SJNC will be in some doubt. That position remains.

### Finance

**3. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I ask the Scottish Executive to join me in welcoming the leader of Plaid Cymru, Dafydd Wigley, who is with us today. [*Applause.*]

To ask the Scottish Executive whether it intends making representations to Her Majesty's Government requesting an increase in the Scottish block. (S10-302)

**The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell):** I have a choice of answers: I could say yes to the first question and ignore the second one. I welcome our colleague from Wales.

The present system for funding Scotland's budget has produced a fair settlement over a number of years. The arrangements for agreeing that settlement are set out in the statement on funding policy that was published by Her Majesty's Treasury on 31 March 1999. The Executive will make representations from time to time for increases in the Scottish budget in line with the circumstances that are set out in that document.

**Alex Neil:** Is the minister aware of the independent report that was prepared by the London-based Centre for Economics and Business Research and published a couple of weeks ago, which shows that Scotland is a net contributor to the UK Treasury? We are paying more taxes in than we are getting money back out. Does he not agree that, rather than subsidising the UK Treasury, it would be far better for Scotland to get its own money back in order to use it to settle the teachers' dispute and to abolish tuition fees

without robbing any other budget in Scotland?

**Mr McConnell:** I am tempted to say no this time. However, I have two points that I want to make. First, as I have said, Scotland does very well out of our national agreement with the UK Treasury. The comprehensive spending review last year produced £800 million—sorry, produced £800 of extra public expenditure over the next three years for every man, woman and child in Scotland. It will produce an extra £1.8 billion for health and £1.3 billion for education.

Another London-based report that was published yesterday was welcomed this morning by Mr Wilson on behalf of the Scottish National party. However, last December he described the same organisation as talking economic gibberish when it accurately reported that Scotland would be a very large debtor of public expenditure if it went down the route that Mr Neil wants to follow, even if some of his front-bench colleagues now have reservations about independence.

### Student Awards Agency

**4. Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many miscalculations have occurred in awards made by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland in each of the last four academic sessions. (S10-339)

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen):** Many awards need to be recalculated every year—for example, because of changes in students' or parents' circumstances or because of errors made on application forms. Recalculations may also be required on occasion because of miscalculations—otherwise known as errors—that may have been made by agency staff. Quality assurance checks are in place to keep those to a minimum. The agency systems do not, however, separately identify the reasons for which recalculations are made.

**Scott Barrie:** Does the minister agree that, in circumstances where an error has been made through no fault of the recipient, maximum discretion should be exercised by the awards agency in trying to recover the excess grant?

**Nicol Stephen:** It is important that there should be flexibility and that individual circumstances should be considered, and that approach is taken. For example, where repayment of a debt would have an adverse effect on a student's studies, the flexibility exists for the student to defer repayment until after graduation.

### Domestic Violence

**6. Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it intends to double the number of refuge places for women and their

children fleeing domestic violence in Scotland. (S10-310)

**The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie):** Refuge spaces for women and their children fleeing domestic violence are provided by local Women's Aid refuges, which are funded by local authorities.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Is the minister aware that 8,000 women and children had to be turned away from women's refuges? In Hamilton, she will be interested to know, 300 women and children were turned away. Will she make every possible effort to negotiate with her Minister for Finance to ensure that refuge places—which were the subject of an excellent debate in the chamber last week—will be doubled?

**Jackie Baillie:** As the person who replied to that debate, I can assure Ms Hyslop that the Scottish partnership on domestic violence, which is currently charged with devising a work plan and a long-term strategy, will report on the consistency and quality of provision across Scotland.

#### Scottish University for Industry

**7. Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will be possible to launch the Scottish university for industry in autumn 2000 as planned, given that no company has yet been set up and no chief executive or directors have been appointed. (S10-329)

**The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish):** Scottish Ufl Ltd will be established next month. The chief executive and directors will be appointed by the end of the year, and the Scottish Ufl will be launched in autumn 2000, as planned.

**Trish Godman:** I thank the minister for his answer. Will this university for industry be distinctive from the universities for industry in England, Wales and Northern Ireland? If so, will it be possible to have a common service throughout the United Kingdom?

**Henry McLeish:** It will be distinctive. We are keen that the Ufl in Scotland should reflect the considerations and the aspirations of the Scottish higher and further education community. We also want to ensure—because we are talking about lifelong learning and distance learning—that we have UK coverage and interchangeability. That said, this is a marvellous concept that is being developed. We will get it on target for the autumn of 2000. It will provide a brokerage system through which people and businesses that need training can be linked with those who provide it. It is breaking new ground, and I assure Trish Godman that we intend to stick to the timetable and ensure that the project is on target. It will be of enormous

benefit to the rest of Scotland.

#### Ministerial Meetings

**9. Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive which ministers have so far met their counterparts from the Cabinet of the National Assembly for Wales. (S10-305)

**The First Minister (Donald Dewar):** I have a long list here, Presiding Officer.

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Oh dear, can you make it short?

**The First Minister:** I never cut off any of my colleagues. Sam Galbraith, Jack McConnell, Susan Deacon, Ross Finnie and Colin Boyd have all met Cabinet members in the Welsh Assembly since 1 July. I talk frequently to Mr Alun Michael on the telephone.

**The Presiding Officer:** That was not very long after all.

**Mr Raffan:** Would the First Minister agree that the more contact we have with members of the Welsh Assembly the better, and does he further welcome the initial steps that have been taken today by Dafydd Wigley and me towards the formation of an all-party Scottish Parliament-Welsh Assembly group?

**The First Minister:** The list of names that I gave shows our anxiety to keep in touch, and I think that exchange of information and ideas is always useful. The formation of an all-party group is a matter for members in this Parliament. I am interested to know where that group might meet, although I note that Mr Keith Raffan has had no difficulty in making the journey from Wales to Scotland.

#### Inverness College

**10. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive how it intends to assist Inverness College, which faces a deficit of £4 million, in providing high-quality further and higher education. (S10-331)

**The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish):** Responsibility for the financial health and funding of all Scotland's further education colleges has, since 1 July, been a matter for the Scottish Further Education Funding Council.

Earlier this month that college informed the council about the scale of the financial position that it faces. It is engaging with the college to consider as a matter of priority what action is required by the college's board of management to address the situation.

**Mary Scanlon:** Does the minister agree that considering redundancies to reduce costs—as the principal of the college must do—will reduce the number of courses on offer, reduce the number of students and reduce potential income, and will lead to greater deficits in the future?

**Henry McLeish:** The college must obviously address the serious financial issues that it faces. It is working with the funding council to ensure that that is done, through consolidation of finances in the short term, to ensure that the £4 million deficit will not be repeated.

It is up to the management of the college to think through all that that involves, and I sincerely hope that the management will take a positive view to ensure that the coverage of courses, access to courses and the quality of the further education that the college provides will not be undermined.

It is important to emphasise that extra money has been given to the Scottish Further Education Funding Council to ensure that we consolidate college finances and improve the quality of management, a review of which is taking place.

I hope that, with good will, those outstanding issues and difficulties can be resolved and that the college can move forward more positively.

#### Deer Farming

**11. Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will consider giving hill livestock compensatory allowance payments to deer farmers. (S10-327)

**The Minister for Rural Affairs (Ross Finnie):** Yes. The consultation paper that I launched recently on the replacement for hill livestock compensatory allowances proposes the inclusion of deer farmers.

**Mr Munro:** I thank the minister for that response. Will the minister assure members that his department will conduct a thorough review of the integrated administration and control system, of which the hill livestock compensatory allowances form a part? I ask this especially regarding the penalties imposed by over-zealous Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food inspectors.

**Ross Finnie:** If, in responding to my colleague who is seated at the back of the chamber, I turn my back on you—and I think that I am using that phrase in its correct context—I hope that you will forgive me.

**The Presiding Officer:** No, I do not think that I will. You cannot be heard if you turn round. [*Laughter.*] Some members may think that that is an important point.

**Ross Finnie:** I am encouraged by the fact that the Scottish National party is not interested in answers to such important questions.

The consultation paper that deals with the review of HLCAs is intended to do exactly what Mr Munro seeks, which is to examine how a new form of less favoured areas subsidy will be directed more precisely towards the kind of situation with which John Farquhar Munro is concerned.

#### Rail Services

**12. David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what representations it will make to the Strategic Rail Authority regarding the issuing of directions and guidance by it in respect of rail services to or from stations in Scotland, including Lockerbie and Dumfries, where no services to such stations both begin and end in Scotland. (S10-315)

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** Under the devolution settlement for railways, Scottish ministers will be able to give guidance to the authority on cross-border services. The Executive will be discussing with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the franchising director the detailed arrangements for exercising that function.

**David Mundell:** Will the Scottish Executive give an assurance that it will give equal weight to the requirements of passengers using Lockerbie station, stations on the Nith valley line and other affected stations and the requirements of passengers travelling from other stations in Scotland in response to calls from users for better services, particularly to and from Glasgow and Edinburgh?

**Sarah Boyack:** We are exploring with the DETR and the shadow strategic rail authority how guidance issued by the Executive will be taken on board. We will also hold discussions with ScotRail.

#### Health Care

**13. Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to improve services for those who suffer from terminal illness. (S10-300)

**The Deputy Minister for Community Care (Iain Gray):** The Scottish Executive aims to provide services that respond to patients' needs. Health boards are responsible for meeting the health care needs of their regional populations, including, of course, those who are terminally ill. Where there is an element of social care, the aim is to provide services that are as responsive and seamless as possible. We and the services concerned are always willing to consider ways to improve responsiveness.

**Michael Matheson:** Does the minister recognise that there is considerable confusion among health boards, local authorities and health trusts about whose responsibility it is to provide palliative care, often leaving someone who has been diagnosed as having a terminal illness in an extremely vulnerable position? Does he recognise that very few hospitals or NHS trusts have a discharge protocol for arranging services with local authorities when individuals are discharged from hospital? Does the minister agree that it is inappropriate that, when someone is in the final stages of life, they should be financially assessed for social services and the care that they may require to remain at home during that final stage?

**Iain Gray:** Palliative care is an area in which I have a particular interest. There are two hospices in my constituency, and I will make an address tomorrow for Marie Curie Cancer Care at its annual review.

The situation is clear: where diagnosis reveals that a person is terminally ill and requires specialist palliative care, it falls to the NHS to provide that care and meet its costs. Guidance on further care packages asks local authorities to treat terminally ill people with sensitivity and, where possible, to exempt the clients from any charge.

### Tourism

**14. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether the Tourism Strategy to be published in January 2000 will address the problem of high transport costs faced by the tourism industry in island areas. (S10-308)

**The Deputy Minister for Highlands and Islands and Gaelic (Mr Alasdair Morrison):** An important objective of the new strategy will be to make the remoter parts of Scotland more attractive to tourists.

**Tavish Scott:** Can the minister confirm that the tendering requirements for the new vessels of the northern isles ferry service, a vital service for tourists coming to Shetland, will specify that two passenger vessels must be provided to maintain a regular overnight service between Lerwick and Aberdeen?

**Mr Morrison:** I am aware of the importance of this issue. Details are being finalised, and my colleagues will soon be consulting on the terms of the draft service specification.

### Education Service

**15. Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether all pupils in Scotland with records of needs are receiving appropriate educational provision. (S10-322)

**The Deputy Minister for Children and Education (Peter Peacock):** The Scottish Executive actively supports local authorities in meeting their statutory responsibility to provide appropriate education for all pupils with special educational needs. Resources allocated to special educational needs have been increased by £11.3 million this year.

**Colin Campbell:** Would the minister agree that he has not quite answered the question? His response has destroyed my supplementary in some ways.

I want to ask—I will ad lib—whether he is convinced that all children requiring records of needs are not being deprived of them in some areas because of budgetary considerations.

**Peter Peacock:** I have never before been accused of not answering a question: that is a novelty.

We are on a journey of trying constantly to improve provision for children with special educational needs. We have started that journey, but it is not yet complete. There is a lot more to be done. We are providing substantial additional resources this year, including an advice line for parents with children who have special educational needs. We have just established a forum to examine a vehicle for continuing dialogue on policy development for children with special educational needs. Although we will always look to improve provision, I think that we have made a positive start on that journey.

### St Mary's Episcopal Primary School, Dunblane

**16. Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether any ministers have plans to visit St Mary's Episcopal Primary School, Dunblane, before the end of the year. (S10-334)

**The Deputy Minister for Children and Education (Peter Peacock):** There are no such plans.

**Mr Monteith:** I am disappointed that the minister has no plans to visit St Mary's. As that school provides education at a cost of £900 per pupil less than equivalent primary schools, will he consider giving St Mary's grant-aided status, which is enjoyed by that other excellent school, Jordanhill?

**Peter Peacock:** I never like to disappoint Mr Monteith, but I may have to. His question reveals the paucity of thinking about education in Conservative circles, because everything seems to be reduced to money. This is not about money. The legislative reform that we seek is to get rid of a rather nasty, divisive piece of legislation that sought to create a two-tier system of education.

We want to signal clearly to every Scottish

parent that they can expect an excellent education service from their local authorities and that they need never opt out to get it.

**Mr Monteith:** The minister will have noticed that I said excellent education, not just any old education, that is £900 cheaper. The bill talks about improving—

**The Presiding Officer:** Ask a question, Mr Monteith.

**Mr Monteith:** I reiterate my question: will the minister offer St Mary's the opportunity to be grant-aided, as Jordanhill is, thus preserving the two-tier status that he will preserve in any case?

**Peter Peacock:** There are no plans to offer St Mary's that status.

### Fisheries

**17. Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has made representations to Her Majesty's Government requesting that the Scottish Executive lead European and international fisheries negotiations on behalf of the United Kingdom. (S1O-317)

**The Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr John Home Robertson):** I have had discussions with the fisheries minister at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I intend to play a full part in the UK team and expect to take a lead role in the appropriate circumstances.

**Richard Lochhead:** I was hoping for a straight yes. Is the minister aware that the fishing industry is 10 times more important to Scotland than it is to the UK, and that 70 per cent of UK fish catches are landed at Scottish ports?

The fishing industry expects the Scottish fisheries minister to go over to Europe, not to carry the UK minister's bags, but to bring back the best possible deal for Scotland's fishing industry. Has the minister made representations directly to the UK Government for the Scottish fisheries department to lead all negotiations, given their overriding importance to the Scottish economy?

**Mr Home Robertson:** I recognise a bag carrier when I see one. Richard Lochhead is quite right in saying that Scotland has the lion's share of Britain's fishing interests. We have most of the fishing grounds, most of the catching capacity and the lion's share of the value of the landings. Mercifully, the people of Scotland wisely rejected the idea of nationalism, and that means that we now have the advantage of having the United Kingdom's 10 votes in the European Council. I intend to use those votes in the interests of Scotland's fishing communities.

**Richard Lochhead:** Does the minister accept

that the best deal for Scotland's fishermen will not be achieved if a representative from another Government conducts the negotiations on behalf of the Scottish industry?

**Mr Home Robertson:** We will act on behalf of the United Kingdom, which has 10 votes in the European Council. As Mr Lochhead has already acknowledged, Scotland has the lion's share of fishing interests and we intend to use our influence appropriately and effectively.

### Stracathro Hospital

**18. Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what assurance can be given that the proposed closure of wards 15 and 6 at Stracathro hospital, Brechin, will not prejudice the outcome of the acute services review currently being undertaken by Tayside Health Board. (S1O-309)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon):** The Tayside University Hospitals NHS Trust has assured me that its proposals will improve service delivery while maintaining appropriate ward occupancy levels. Those changes will not result in a reduction of the services that are currently provided at Stracathro hospital.

**Irene McGugan:** Will the minister undertake, as a matter of urgency, to investigate and facilitate the reinstatement to full-time use of the mobile magnetic resonance imaging scanner that was removed from Stracathro in March?

**Susan Deacon:** As I said in my earlier response to a question on the same subject, such issues are matters for local resolution. I am keen to ensure that they are discussed and resolved effectively at local level. I refer Irene McGugan to my earlier answer to Mr Welsh.

### "Making it work together"

**19. Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will provide a breakdown of the total cost of the launch of "Making it work together: A programme for government" on 6 September 1999. (S1O-314)

**The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell):** The total cost of the launch of "Making it work together" is estimated at around £4,300.

**Phil Gallie:** I thank the minister for his answer. Given the perception that the Parliament should be visible around the country, what provisions have been made for the Parliament's committees to hold meetings, as required, in every town and village throughout Scotland?

**The Presiding Officer:** I do not think that that is

a matter for the minister. Do you want to comment, Mr McConnell?

**Mr McConnell:** No. To be fair to my colleagues, a member has to ask a supplementary that is relevant to the initial question.

**The Presiding Officer:** That is right.

### Local Government Finance

**20. Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** As well as welcoming Dafydd Wigley to the chamber, we should welcome back the sadly missed Keith Raffan.

To ask the Scottish Executive what action it intends to take to ensure that Scottish local authorities are fully cognisant with the terms of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998. (S10-332)

**The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell):** It is essentially a matter for the local authorities themselves to ensure that they are fully aware of the terms of the act, but I have spoken to Councillor Norman Murray, the president of COSLA, who confirmed that COSLA is writing to councils to draw their attention to the importance of this matter.

**Mr Gibson:** I thank the minister for his answer, but I am concerned that the Scottish Executive is complacent. Is the minister aware of the survey by the Forum of Private Business in Scotland, which was released on 12 July, which named and shamed Scottish local authorities that are consistently late payers? Does he know that the survey named and shamed 10 local authorities that pay more than 35 per cent of their external invoices after 30 days? Is he aware that those local authorities are thus open to surcharge under the act, which could, in turn, affect council tax levels, reserves and services? With no central record kept of aggregate external invoicing, is he satisfied that he is in a position to act when necessary?

**Mr McConnell:** Mr McLeish and I are well aware of the seriousness of the matter and we have had a number of recent meetings about it. I hope that, as he realises the importance of the matter, Mr Gibson will address some of his remarks to Mr Bruce Crawford, who used to run—and is, I believe, still a member of—one of those 10 councils.

### Health Care

**21. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will make a statement on the action it is taking to prevent heart disease in Scotland. (S10-323)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care**

**(Susan Deacon):** In recent years, the Scottish rates of premature death and illness from the disease have been improving but they remain unacceptably high. Prevention remains a priority for the Executive, as our heart of Scotland demonstration project makes clear.

**Karen Whitefield:** Is the minister aware that Lanarkshire has one of the highest levels of heart disease in Scotland? Does she agree that preventive action must begin with children? If so, how will she ensure that children and young adults value healthy eating and exercise?

**Susan Deacon:** I am aware of the high rate of heart disease throughout Scotland, which is why I am determined to take action to tackle it along with our other two big killer diseases, strokes and cancer. As I said fairly fully in the recent debate on public health, a number of actions should be taken, including ensuring that people are informed about how diet and lifestyle changes can make a difference. The action that we are taking on smoking will make a difference. We will continue to work with the Health Education Board Scotland, local health boards and schools to raise young people's awareness of what a healthy lifestyle is.

### People's Juries

**22. Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive why £1 million has been earmarked to support people's juries rather than the existing network of local community and voluntary groups and whether it has any plans to increase funding for such groups. (S10-333)

**The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander):** We have allocated £1 million to fund both people's panels and people's juries and a further £2 million to support a national skills development programme for community representatives in social inclusion partnerships and the agencies that work with them.

The Scottish Executive is therefore supporting a variety of mechanisms to ensure that communities are equipped to influence decision making in their areas.

**Shona Robison:** Is the minister really saying that the vast network of community and voluntary groups with years of experience is unable to tell her what the local priorities of an area are?

**Ms Alexander:** Far from it. My answer has just revealed that we are providing four times as much money to community representatives and social inclusion partnerships than we are providing to citizens' juries. I hope, therefore, that Shona Robison is happy with how we are proceeding.

## Open Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Higher Education

**1. Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what are the details of its higher education policy. (S1O-318)

**The First Minister (Donald Dewar):** We are committed to the highest standards in further and higher education on the principle that anyone who can benefit from it should have the opportunity to do so. As Alex Salmond will remember, if we take the comprehensive spending review period, the additional funds for higher education compared with the figure that we inherited amount to £250 million. He will have read the programme for government document, and will therefore know that that sets out our priorities on how to deliver our policies.

**Mr Salmond:** Both the First Minister and I benefited from student grants and no tuition fees.

Can the First Minister explain the rights of this Parliament and clear up some confusion that has crept in? After a suggestion that a vote against tuition fees would not be binding on the Parliament, an Executive spokesperson, in what was described as a carefully phrased statement, said:

“The Executive would always wish to take into account the views expressed by the Parliament”.

It is reassuring to know that our views will be taken into account, but this is a Parliament, so I ask the First Minister: if this Parliament passes by resolution a motion against tuition fees, will it be binding on the Executive, yes or no?

**The First Minister:** The position is simply that this Parliament is master at the end of the day, but that not every motion that is passed by this Parliament is binding upon the Executive. If the Executive did not respond in a way that Parliament found satisfactory, a whole range of democratic options is open to Parliament. I leave to Mr Salmond the selection that he might want to make if the circumstance occurred.

We are all, if we are sensible, waiting for the response from Andrew Cubie and his colleagues with regard to tuition fees. We will all want to look at what is a complex matter, and if Mr Salmond has been following, as I have, the evidence that has been submitted by various organisations, he will see that the issue requires not a snatched or prejudiced decision, but a long, careful and proper look at the evidence. That is what the Executive, and I hope this Parliament, will do.

**Mr Salmond:** On the evidence that has been

submitted by various organisations, the Conservative party, the Liberal Democrat party and the Scottish National party have all submitted evidence against tuition fees. There has been no submission of evidence by the Labour party in Scotland. Can the First Minister remind this Parliament when the Labour party in Scotland passed a motion in favour of tuition fees for higher education?

**The First Minister:** I do not know the extent to which I can talk on party matters, as I am here to answer questions as a member of the Executive, but if I may be allowed the indulgence, the Labour party is in favour of widening access to higher education and ensuring that we sustain the improvements that we have seen in the past, but which until recently have been undermined by the lack of proper financing. The financing system that is required is the conundrum that the Cubie committee has been invited to consider. Of course, that is the problem that we in the Parliament must address—not just the Executive, but the elected body representing all parts of Scotland.

The important fact is that an elected body that is to command trust is one that will be prepared to look and listen and make a considered judgment about the advice and the evidence that come out of the Cubie inquiry.

**Mr Salmond:** To my knowledge, no resolution has been passed in favour of tuition fees by the Labour party in Scotland, nor did the words “tuition fees” appear in the Labour party manifesto for this year’s election. Those of us who did have a manifesto commitment against tuition fees looked with some warmth at the words of Iain Smith on Monday, when he said about the Liberal Democrats:

“We will vote against tuition fees. There has never been room for compromise on that”.

I welcome those words, but does the First Minister consider them compatible with his definition of collective responsibility in his Executive?

**The First Minister:** I have said this consistently, and I hope that no one will criticise me for repeating it. I believe that it is in everyone’s interest to consider the evidence that is produced, to measure their approach against that evidence and to come to a conclusion that they believe is right. I have always understood that the Liberal Democrat party had a position and that it would submit evidence in support of that. When the Cubie report comes out and the evidence is there, we will see whether that ameliorates things or changes views.

If Alex Salmond is telling me that his position is that he has taken up a stance, and in the face of all the evidence—whatever it might suggest—he

will never alter that stance, he is taking an unwise position. That is a matter entirely for him. We will examine the evidence and consult our friends, and the Executive will decide on the best way forward in the interest of higher education in Scotland. If we had a constructive debate rather than scare stories, that would help the cause considerably.

### Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

**2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many times the First Minister has met with the Secretary of State for Scotland since 1 July 1999 to discuss matters relating to the governance of Scotland and whether further regular meetings between them have been scheduled. (S10-319)

**The First Minister (Donald Dewar):** Members will not be surprised to know that I meet John Reid frequently and in a number of different capacities. We have regular meetings on the governance of Scotland, which I have every expectation will continue to mutual benefit.

**David McLetchie:** Will the First Minister tell us, given that it would have to be introduced on a United Kingdom basis, whether his discussions with the secretary of state have covered the so-called graduate tax? Given the reported enthusiasm with which Mr Wallace has taken up that idea, it seems strange that he has apparently been excluded from discussions on the topic. The next time the First Minister meets the secretary of state to discuss higher education, will he bring the Deputy First Minister in from the cold?

**The First Minister:** That is a very amusing contribution to the debate. I would like to think that it was meant to be amusing, otherwise Mr McLetchie is being remarkably naive. I read the front page of *The Scotsman* frequently, often with interest and sometimes with curiosity.

We have not advocated a graduate tax. I know of no work that is going on in relation to a graduate tax. Therefore, I know of no substance for the suggestions that Mr McLetchie is putting to me. The findings of the Cubie report and the discussions that follow will be of interest to my colleagues in other parts of the United Kingdom, as they will be of interest to Scotland.

**David McLetchie:** I am sure that they will. It is interesting that there are no discussions on the graduate tax. Perhaps the First Minister should have told Mr Wallace before he went enthusiastically to the newspapers indicating that it was an interesting idea, which was worth considering.

Instead of this kite-flying, is not the simplest solution for the Scottish Executive to accept the settled will of the overwhelming majority of the people of Scotland to abolish tuition fees

immediately after 6 May? The Executive should not start tinkering around with graduate taxes, which owes more to desperation to keep the coalition together and enthusiasm for imposing new taxes on people in Scotland, than to dealing with higher education funding.

**The First Minister:** As an example of a constructive contribution, that ranks low. Having just been told that the graduate tax was not a subject that we were raising, Mr McLetchie asks his supplementary on the basis that it is a matter that we are raising. If he will not listen to a word that I say, I will have to stop speaking to him. I am prepared to make him an offer, which is meant to be helpful. He has an idea that this is a simple matter with simple solutions. I am prepared to arrange a meeting for him with a representative group of people in higher education. I will even buy him a poke of chips—a small and simple meal. He can sit down and discuss the future of higher education funding. He might not change his mind, but at least he will not come here and tell us that the matter is simple of solution and does not require anxious consideration and debate.

**Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con):** If the Scottish Parliament votes to abolish tuition fees or to introduce another form of funding part or all of the costs of higher education, will the First Minister commit the Executive to introducing a bill to translate that decision into reality?

**The First Minister:** We will have to wait and see what emerges from the Cubie committee report. As I said to Alex Salmond, we are spending considerably more than was planned by the previous Government—£250 million over the three years on higher education, and another £214 million over the same period, against the same comparative base, on further education. Clearly, we are putting our money where our principles are.

We are interested in getting the right system for the future. There has been an absolute explosion in the number of people in higher education.

**David McLetchie:** Thanks to us.

**The First Minister:** All that the Conservative Government failed to put in place was the funding base to maintain it. Mr McLetchie could perhaps turn his mind to that.

We are now interested in getting the system right. We will consult, examine the evidence and come up with solutions. I hope that the member supports us when the time comes.

### Objective 2 Funding

**3. Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what input it has had in the redrawing of the objective 2 status map for

Scotland. (S1O-328)

**The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell):** The Scottish Executive is the implementing authority for structural funds in Scotland. We are closely involved in the preparation of the UK proposals to the Commission for objective 2 coverage, as we want to ensure that the coverage is targeted on areas of real need. The Executive has now made detailed recommendations for coverage in Scotland to the UK Government and we will continue to work with UK ministers to achieve the best deal for communities across Scotland.

**Bristow Muldoon:** I welcome the minister's response. Will he strongly consider the case that has been submitted by West Lothian, which recognises the overall strength of the local economy while arguing for targeting within local government areas of objective 2 status at areas demonstrating disadvantage in terms of unemployment, skills, educational attainment and other indicators?

**Mr McConnell:** There are communities in West Lothian, as in other parts of Scotland, that would benefit from European funding and are in need of Government and European support. It would be wrong at this stage to speculate on which communities might be on the final map. It is important that we get right the final proposals that we put to the European Commission. We are working closely with UK ministers to ensure that that happens. When we submit the proposals, I am sure that we will have achieved a good deal for Scotland.

**Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** In view of the very high unemployment in Clackmannanshire and the representations that were made in last week's debate—which, unfortunately, I was unable to attend because I was in hospital—will the minister press for Clackmannanshire to be included in the redrawing of the objective 2 status map, so that it becomes eligible for those European funds?

**Mr McConnell:** I can confirm that we are pressing for the most needy communities across Scotland, which would benefit most from European structural funds, to be included on the map. People can make their own assumptions about which communities that might include.

**Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP):** At the risk of getting the same answer, may I point out to the minister that statistics published earlier this week show that Dumfries and Galloway has by far the highest percentage of low-paid workers of any local authority area in Great Britain? Does he agree, therefore, that it is essential that Dumfries and Galloway qualifies for objective 2 funding?

**Mr McConnell:** I am happy to give the same answer. It is important that we do not compromise the negotiations with the European Commission that will have to take place, or expose our hand in detail. On Alasdair Morgan's specific point, I was fortunate enough to be able to announce yesterday more than £1 million in structural fund grants for the Dumfries and Galloway area. That will lead to a significant improvement in the local economy and local communities through improved transport links and transport information.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes question time. I want to make an obvious point that might not have occurred to members—it is not compulsory to ask a supplementary question.

## Water Industry

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The next item of business is a statement by Sarah Boyack on the water industry. The minister will take questions at the end of the statement, so there should be no interventions.

15:15

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** The purpose of this statement is to announce the appointment of the first water industry commissioner for Scotland, but I would also like to take this opportunity to set out the new regulatory arrangements for the Scottish water industry and the commissioner's vital place in the new framework. The new regulatory arrangements were announced by the Scottish Executive in July, but so far there has not been an opportunity for Parliament to discuss them.

The water industry is a vital part of our lives, yet it is almost invisible to most of us, most of the time. Clean, safe drinking water, and efficient, environmentally friendly removal of waste are essential for our survival, yet we take those services for granted—we expect safe water to come from the tap whenever we need it, and waste to be removed with no apparent effort. However, much of the basic infrastructure on which we rely, both for drinking water and for sewage, was put in place in the Victorian era. It has served us well, but decades of under-investment mean that much of it needs to be replaced soon. That is the backdrop against which new challenges must be faced.

The Scottish water industry faces twin challenges: to meet the aspirations of the Scottish people in terms of environmental standards and drinking water quality, and to do so at minimum cost to the customer.

The water industry has a central role to play in our ambitions for sustainable development in Scotland. That is reflected in the Executive's programme of government, in which no less than three of the key environmental commitments will be delivered through the Scottish water authorities: improving standards of urban waste water treatment by the end of 2000; bringing Scotland's designated bathing beaches up to European standards; and investing to raise the quality of Scotland's drinking water.

The challenge that is posed by those commitments should not be underestimated. It involves an unprecedented investment programme of around £1.7 billion over three years, and significant further investment will be needed beyond that. The industry has to work to long time

scales, a fact that increases the importance to the authorities of being able to plan for the medium term with some certainty.

Investment is needed to meet our European obligations, which cannot and should not be evaded. Most prominent among them are the urban waste water treatment directive, the main provisions of which take effect at the end of next year, and the drinking water directive, for which the main deadline is 2003. More important, investment is needed to protect and improve the quality of our rivers, coasts and beaches, and to ensure that the water that we drink meets the highest public health standards.

The second part of the challenge is to achieve those objectives and deliver the investment programme at the least cost to customers. The water industry's activities can be financed only from charges to customers and by borrowing, which has to be repaid. Scotland's water services are firmly in the public sector and that is where they will stay, because the people of Scotland have made it clear that that is what they want. Our three water authorities are accountable to the Executive, and through the Executive to the Parliament, for their performance.

The coming of the Scottish Parliament strengthens the direct chain of accountability between the authorities, democratically elected representatives and customers. We must demonstrate that our Scottish approach can also deliver on efficiency and customer service. We need a regulatory regime for the Scottish water industry that provides the best framework for meeting this environmental and public health challenge at the minimum cost to the consumer. I am confident that the arrangements that will come into effect on 1 November provide such a framework.

The Water Industry Act 1999, which became law in June this year, included provisions for reform of the regulatory system in Scotland, including the establishment of an independent water industry commissioner. Because devolution was about to take effect, our predecessors deliberately drafted the legislation in a way that left it to the new Scottish Executive to decide whether to implement the new system.

Having considered carefully the present system, we had little hesitation in agreeing that there was an urgent need for change. Customers deserve a system that ensures that their interests will come first and that they will get the highest-quality services at the best price.

The water authorities need a system that gives them clarity and certainty, so that they can plan and manage their operations as efficiently as possible.

The Scottish Executive's three roles in relation to the water industry are as owner, environmental and public health regulator, and efficiency regulator. In addition, the regime that we inherited involves a completely artificial division between the Scottish Executive—as efficiency regulator—and the customers council, which has primary responsibility for agreeing water charges, looking only one year ahead. It is difficult to carry out that function without a full appreciation of the scope for efficiency gains in the water authorities and the investment programmes that the authorities need to implement.

Before devolution, ministers carried out a wide-ranging review of the water industry and concluded that it was essential to bring together the strands of economic regulation and price setting. The new regulatory regime will remove that artificial divide and, by bringing efficiency regulation under the responsibility of the new water industry commissioner, will distinguish more clearly between the roles played by the Scottish Executive. A crucial feature of the commissioner's remit will be his professional scrutiny of the water authorities' finances.

The water industry commissioner is at the centre of the new approach. His overriding duty is to promote the interest of all water customers. There is no conflict between his two roles of economic regulation and customer protection—those are the functions that come under the term economic regulation. His role—to examine closely the authorities' finances, to question and challenge their costs, and to encourage them to be as efficient as possible—is at the heart of customers' interests.

We believe that that role should be carried out with rigour, transparency and clear independence from Government. That will reassure customers that the water authorities' finances are subject to independent, expert scrutiny and will enable them to see that the charges they pay are being kept as low as possible.

Alongside those new responsibilities, the commissioner will take over the Scottish water and sewerage customers council's current roles, including investigating unresolved customer complaints and approving the authorities' codes of practice. We are grateful to the members and staff of the council for their work and their commitment over the years to protect the interests of customers. I am confident that the commissioner will inherit firm foundations, which have been laid by the council.

The commissioner also needs to know about customers' concerns on a regional or even local basis. That is why there will be three local consultative committees to support the commissioner and advise him on the interests of

customers. The commissioner will chair those committees, ensuring that their advice is at the heart of the regulatory process.

The new regime will also change the way in which the Scottish Executive plays its role of environmental regulator. The commissioner's job will be to provide expert economic analysis and advice, but it is not his job to decide which areas of the water authorities' plans and operations are essential or optional. Those are issues for ministers, who are responsible for defining the standards of water quality and environmental protection that must be met by the water authorities. Most of those standards flow from European commitments, while others reflect the Government's own priorities for the industry.

Therefore, the Scottish Executive will give the commissioner a statement defining the standards that must be met by the water authorities. The commissioner will still be able to challenge the cost of the work associated with those standards, but he will not be able to question the need for that work. We shall publish that statement at the same time as we send it to the commissioner. It will be an important new step. For the first time, Government will set out clearly in one place the standards that it requires the water authorities to meet. For the first version of the paper, we plan to bring together the standards that have already been set and the broad implications for the investment requirements of the water authorities.

However, the document is not the end of the story. It marks the beginning of a continuous and transparent process in which, as we strive for improved environmental standards, we will be able to assess and provide for the resources needed to deliver those standards. It means that the commitments that we make will be achievable as well as challenging.

The quality and standards paper and a broader guidance document on the conduct of the charging process will form the essential framework within which the commissioner and the water authorities will operate. Within that framework, the commissioner will advise ministers on the charge levels necessary to enable the authorities to meet the environmental and water quality standards that have been set. In effect, the commissioner will recommend to ministers the level of a charge cap, which normally will be for a period of several years. Ministers will consider the commissioner's expert advice and decide whether to endorse his recommendations. They will then finally set the charge cap.

We are committed to ensuring that that process has maximum transparency. There will be no question of the commissioner's professional expertise being compromised or influenced by ministers. The legislation guarantees that all

stages of the process, including both the commissioner's advice and ministers' decisions, will be made public. That demonstrates our commitment to a process that is rigorous and open, and our commitment to avoiding short-termism.

Once ministers have decided on the level of the charge cap each year, the commissioner and the water authorities will agree, or if necessary refer to ministers, the individual charges for services. The water authorities' annual charge schemes will have to fit within the charge cap that ministers have set.

Our basic principles will be quality, efficiency, transparency and accountability. The water authorities have a key role in cleaning up our beaches and rivers, and in using water in a sustainable way. However, success in meeting those broader objectives will depend on partnership, not only between the Scottish Executive, the new commissioner and the water authorities, but with local authorities, industry and us as individuals. Local authorities have a key role in the planning and provision of amenities. Industry and the farming community can minimise waste and water pollution through improved practices. All of us can use water resources more responsibly. The Scottish Executive will work to encourage that partnership approach.

I take this opportunity to give an example of the partnership approach in action. I have intervened to defer for a year the increases in water charges facing some charities and voluntary organisations. Last year, the water authorities and the customers council agreed to begin withdrawing relief from charges that is currently granted to a range of bodies. As a result, those bodies faced higher water bills this year.

Soon after I took office, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations made representations to me that the charitable and voluntary bodies facing higher bills had not been given enough warning about the increases. As those bodies typically operate on fixed, annual grants, it was becoming clear that the money to pay for the increased water bills might have to be found by reducing front-line services. Given the importance that the Executive places on the voluntary sector's contribution to Scottish life, I was concerned by that, and agreed to investigate.

Although the average increase in bills is small and the water authorities were acting quite properly in trying to ensure fair treatment for all their charge payers, I agree with the SCVO that the organisations that were faced with higher bills needed more time to budget for them. Therefore, I have arranged with the water authorities that they will immediately restore in full relief for the current year. The SCVO will welcome that breathing

space for its members. It understands the argument that its members should pay for the services that they receive, but deferring the withdrawal of relief until 1 April 2000 satisfies its main concern. I am pleased to say that there is further protection for the sector, in that the full charges will not come on stream for five years.

We had no doubt that it should be a priority to put the new regulatory regime in place as soon as possible. We have decided to implement the new regulatory arrangements from 1 November. That means that benefits can begin to feed through to customers and the water authorities from the water charges settlement for the next financial year. If we had not made that decision, the annual nature of the charging round means that the new regime would have had no impact until April 2001.

We announced that decision promptly, in July, because we needed to move quickly to identify and appoint a suitable person as the first water industry commissioner, in time for 1 November. We were determined to ensure that the appointment process complied fully with the rigorous principles that are required by the commissioner for public appointments.

The demanding and important new position of water industry commissioner needs someone with the right blend of special skills, experience and personal qualities. I am delighted to announce to the Parliament that we have found such a person, and that we plan to appoint Alan Sutherland as water industry commissioner from 1 November.

Mr Sutherland has relevant expertise and experience. He studied economics, and has wide experience in banking and in management consultancy. He also has direct experience of establishing and managing a customer-focused company in challenging circumstances. I am convinced that Mr Sutherland has a firm commitment to ensuring the highest levels of service and value for customers. He also understands clearly the business and economic issues that confront the water industry. I have no doubt that his experience and talents make him well suited to the post of water industry commissioner.

Our new regime will involve a powerful new watchdog for customer interests, equipped to ensure that prices are no higher than required to meet our environmental and public health objectives. There will be a longer planning horizon, through a multi-year cap on charges, giving greater stability for customers and water authorities. The system will be much more transparent, with a clearer division between the Executive's roles as owner, economic regulator and setter of environmental standards. It will be a regulatory regime under which Scotland's public water industry can become a world leader in

customer service and efficiency.

I am happy to take questions from members.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson):** Thank you. As the minister said, she will take questions from members. Members who want to speak should press their request to speak buttons. I remind members that questions should be in the form of a question and should be brief.

**Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer, I take on board your comments, but I am disappointed that the minister took 15 minutes to make her statement and that the Opposition is allowed only one question in response. I have, therefore, to limit my question to one aspect of the issue: the new arrangements for the regulation of the water industry.

I congratulate Mr Sutherland on his appointment, but is it not the case that the new role of water commissioner is that of the Executive's placeman? Given that the water commissioner will be subservient to the civil servants as opposed to the customers—the water consumers—the voice of the consumer has been silenced. Would it not be a step in the right direction for the water commissioner to report back to the Parliament, rather than to the ministers, so that we can play a role in defending the customers' interests, given that they have not been taken into account under the new arrangements?

Will the minister respond to concerns expressed by the Scottish Consumer Council—which are shared by the SNP—that the proposals to make the water commissioner chair the local, so-called consultative, committees will not lead to a strong independent voice for the consumer?

**Sarah Boyack:** On the last point, the whole purpose of appointing an independent commissioner is that he will be able to take direct responses from consumers. We have ensured that he will chair local forums so that he will be able to hear consumers' concerns directly. It is important to stress that all those meetings will be held in public; the meetings will be a matter of public record and people will be able to assess the independence of the water commissioner.

I hope that the framework that we have established will provide accountability. Every part of the chain will be open and publicly accountable. It will be possible for the Transport and the Environment Committee, for example, to discuss the issue of the water industry and its regulation in the future. There will be an effective process of accountability, through the Scottish ministers' appointment of the water commissioner, who will report back to them. All that correspondence will be made public. People will be able to see how

decisions are being made.

The purpose of the commissioner is to act in the interests of consumers and to ensure that they understand the key issues that the water authorities are addressing. At the moment, we do not think that that role is being carried out effectively.

**Richard Lochhead:** If the new role is—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Excuse me, Mr Lochhead, but you do not have a supplementary question on a statement. I will move on to the next questioner.

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** I share Mr Lochhead's concerns, and I have noted the response to his comments. I am a little unclear from the statement about how the local consultative committees will be constituted. How will members be appointed and who will they be—or, if members have already been appointed, who are they?

On a lighter note, I presume that the title of water industry commissioner is to ensure that the mnemonic is WIC rather than WC?

**Sarah Boyack:** That last comment was very helpful.

Committees will appointed in the same way as before. Their membership will be made public so that everyone can know who is on them. Their purpose will be to feed through the interests of the customer, just as they do at the moment. The difference will be that the water industry commissioner will have direct access to the views of those people. That is a matter on which the Executive can report back to the Parliament. We will have to review the way in which the process operates.

I acknowledge the concerns that Mr Lochhead and Miss Goldie have expressed. This is a new system and I hope that it will work effectively, but we will monitor the process.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** I welcome the minister's statement, which I believe will significantly increase the public accountability of the water and sewerage industry.

I remind the minister of the success of an earlier example of co-operation between the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. The Strathclyde water referendum decisively rejected the policies of the previous Conservative Government—policies that would have threatened the continuing operation of the industry in the public sector. I know from the debate earlier today that the Conservative party is suffering from voluntary collective amnesia—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr McNulty, will you come to your question please?

**Des McNulty:** It is important to emphasise the commitment to retain the industry in the public sector. Will the minister describe the mechanisms of accountability now that we have a Parliament and a public water industry? It is important to stress that both of those things have now been established.

**Richard Lochhead** *rose*—

**Miss Goldie:** On a point of order. Had I been able to express myself as Mr McNulty has done, I could have asked about five questions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members to ask questions and not to make statements. The more that people can observe that rule, the more questions they will be able to ask.

**Sarah Boyack:** I am happy to reassure Mr McNulty that the process that we have established today should ensure accountability and transparency in our public water authorities. The Scottish Executive will set the framework through its paper on quality and standards. The paper will inform the water authorities, via the water industry commissioner, of the standards that we hope they will meet.

We want a dynamic public sector water industry that can learn from the private sector, because there are many ways in which the water industry will be able to develop over time. The critical thing is that it will be accountable through Parliament—I appoint the water industry commissioner—and through local forums to the customers. Their views will be heard through the water industry commissioner. Local water authorities will still be appointed by ministers and there will be opportunities for local involvement at that level as well, as there was in the most recent round of appointments.

**Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD):** Is the minister aware that the model of consumer representation that is in the statement is not widely accepted? In the energy industry, for example, the need for the consumer body to be independent of the regulator is well recognised. What informed and industry-oriented body will criticise the water industry commissioner if he acts against the interest of consumers?

**Sarah Boyack:** The approach that we have taken acknowledges that the water authorities are in the public sector. They are not accountable to shareholders; they are accountable to their charge payers and their customers. We make that distinction. I hope that the system will be transparent and that people will be able to see the process by which the water industry commissioner regulates the three water authorities. The Parliament will be able to monitor that over time. I am confident that our system will deliver

transparency and accountability.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** On two occasions during the summer there were water shortages in Fort William. The nearest elected councillor serving on the North of Scotland Water Authority was based in the east of Scotland. My constituents would have had to traverse the Mamores and the Cairngorms to consult that councillor. If the minister favours partnership, will she appoint at least two councillors from the Highland Council area, from which not one councillor serves on NOSWA now? If not, is the partnership that she talked about the partnership of Jonah and the whale?

Why are NOSWA and the other water authorities not to be members of the proposed Scottish utilities forum?

**Sarah Boyack:** It is not possible to ensure that every area is represented on boards. Of the people who put themselves forward, we try to choose from the widest geographical spread possible, bearing in mind, of course, the talents they offer.

On the Scottish utilities forum, we think that the system that we have established today will be effective and workable, and will meet our objective of achieving high-quality standards in our water industry, as set out in our programme for government.

**Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab):** The minister will be familiar with the study commissioned by West of Scotland Water Authority into why Ayrshire beaches have failed to meet European water standards. Will she outline what specific measures she is introducing to improve standards in the interests of public health and local tourism?

**Sarah Boyack:** I am happy to report that the West of Scotland Water Authority is implementing a significant investment programme to ensure that there are cleaner beaches on the Clyde coast. Earlier this summer, I visited the waterworks at Fairlie, where the new system is being introduced.

It is important to take into account not only the work of the water authorities but the fact that there are wider industry and agricultural challenges to meet. A key long-term issue that we need to consider is partnership between the range of people involved. I want to pick out the farming community in particular, with whom we had some good discussions over the summer. In the coming years, we will have to address issues such as diffuse pollution, which can be done only in partnership. I am glad to say that the Scottish National Farmers Union's response was very positive, which bodes well for the future.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** A motion on public appointments will, I hope, be lodged soon. In view of that, will the minister tell us how many people were considered for the post and how many were on the final shortlist?

**Sarah Boyack:** There were 20 applications for the post. As the appointment was made according to the Nolan requirements, I cannot tell Mr Harper how many people were shortlisted. However, if he is keen to know, I can provide that information in writing afterwards.

**Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab):** I welcome the minister's statement on the firm commitment to keep the water industry in the public sector and the relief for charities and organisations that has been announced.

I want to follow up Euan Robson's question by asking whether a number of different models for regulation were considered and why this particular model was chosen as the best.

**Sarah Boyack:** This model was chosen because we felt that it reflected the opportunities provided by the establishment of the Parliament to introduce an effective system that would be accountable to MSPs. It was important to separate off the issue of economic regulation, which we felt was not appropriate for the rural affairs department to operate. The job of ministers is to set overall environmental standards. The water industry commissioner will be able to review local water authorities to ensure that they are providing as efficient and as effective a service as possible. We feel that the chosen model will be economically efficient, will meet environmental standards and will be accountable to Parliament.

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP):** As the minister has referred to her desire for openness and transparency, will she detail how much the first water commissioner for Scotland is being paid, what benefits he will receive and how much his likely staff will cost?

**Sarah Boyack:** The water industry commissioner's starting salary will be £67,500 a year. The commissioner's staff costs will come to £1 million, which is broadly the same as existing arrangements.

**Dorothy-Grace Elder:** Can I suggest—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer :** I am sorry; you do not have a supplementary question.

**Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con):** I want to ask Ms Boyack about the capping regime on costs. She will doubtless remember that, earlier in the session, she provided an answer to a parliamentary question in which she said that the external financing limit available to North of Scotland Water Authority was programmed to

decline quite sharply over the period from 1996 to 2002. In that context, will the regime that is being introduced guarantee that customers in that water authority area will have the same standards at the same pace and at broadly the same cost as customers pay in other parts of the country? As not everyone can pay the same amount, can we have a cost regime that is broadly comparable between regions?

**Sarah Boyack:** The water industry commissioner's regime will ensure appropriate investment to meet environmental standards in each water authority area, that charges are reasonable and that water authorities carry out their job as efficiently as possible. However, we have not established a regime in the way that Mr Tosh suggests.

I am sure we all accept that it is much more difficult to provide water and sewerage facilities in the northern part of Scotland. That reflects the point Mr Ewing made. I visited some of those areas in the summer. They are very spread out and provide a challenge for the water authorities. We must bear that in mind when setting standards for the authorities in the coming years.

## Homelessness

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson):** We move on to the debate on motion S1M-154, in the name of Ms Wendy Alexander, on homelessness. There is also an amendment to the motion. Members who wish to speak in this debate may now press their request to speak buttons.

15:45

**The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander):** Tackling homelessness is a fitting challenge for this Parliament. The most extreme form of homelessness—rough sleeping—is one of the most serious forms of social exclusion in Scotland. It is demeaning, damages self-esteem and blights life chances, sometimes forever. That is why, when the First Minister invited each of his Cabinet colleagues to choose their top priority for the programme of government, I chose to end the need for anyone to have to sleep rough by the end of this Parliament. That promise is not made as some moralistic gesture but as a concrete and hugely ambitious target by which I invite this Parliament to judge the Executive's efforts.

Let me anticipate some of the interventions. The target date is no longer December 2002, but May 2003. I will tell members why. It is because that change of date signals a change of direction.

Last week, in the programme for government debate, we listened to some cheap knockabout that I had hoped would be left in another place. "It's all about focus groups," said the Tories. "It's all about PR spin," said the SNP. I would like this debate to make Scotland feel better about its politicians.

The new direction on rough sleeping comes from what Jackie Baillie and I have seen and heard throughout Scotland this summer. Two years ago, within weeks of coming to power, Labour made its commitment to the rough sleepers initiative. There are already 138 hostel places and 100 new support workers; 1,364 rough sleepers have been helped, 200 of them directly from the streets.

Jackie and I wanted to know what was happening on the ground. We travelled around Scotland and saw what was happening at the sharp end. We visited the new Shelter family project in Edinburgh, the Simon Community safe houses in Glasgow and *The Big Issue* and its vendors. Next week we will go to Glasgow's lodging house mission. We were listening and learning; now we are acting. All the organisations had the same message; rooflessness is about more than housing.

During the past two years, the rough sleepers

initiative has given people at the sharp end a chance to pause and undertake some serious survey work, often for the first time, on rough sleeping. We now know that 8,000 Scots probably spend at least one night a year sleeping rough. We are also learning what keeps people on the streets.

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** I am reassured to know that the minister spent the summer visiting hostels and the like. I recall that the minister's predecessors—Calum Macdonald and Malcolm Chisholm—made those same visits. Were they not listening? Did they not learn anything? They set the target of 2002, but the minister is now saying that the target is 2003. What great insights has the minister had in the past few months that her predecessors did not?

**Ms Alexander:** That exact point was the basis for the report, undertaken as part of the rough sleepers initiative, that hit my desk 10 days ago.

Three quarters of the rough sleepers in Glasgow had used drugs in the last month; 60 per cent had mental health problems; few had medical support. Sixty per cent of rough sleepers are regular hostel dwellers and 65 per cent now have at least one failed tenancy behind them. Almost half of those who are sleeping rough in the streets of Glasgow have been in a hostel, but 70 per cent of them have been evicted and almost half of them have had some sort of accommodation ban for violent behaviour, drug or alcohol abuse or rent arrears.

The message is clear: rough sleeping is about more than homelessness. Yesterday I announced a 40 per cent increase in the budget—an extra £6 million for the next two years. Two million pounds will be available for local authorities that have not yet developed comprehensive rough sleeping strategies. Many of them are in rural areas, where the problems of rough sleeping are less obvious, but no less distressing for that. Two million pounds extra will be available for support services to help rough sleepers with the acute problems I have described so that they can be supported when they go into permanent accommodation and do not go back on to the streets.

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** I welcome the additional funding. As a member of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, I am still waiting to see a copy of the announcement that was made on Tuesday. That point needs to be raised.

There is concern that access to finance for rough sleepers initiatives across the country is through challenge funding. Bidding for funding means that there are winners and losers. Will the minister commit to ending the challenge funding aspect of the rough sleepers initiative?

**Ms Alexander:** I am happy to commit that, to

meet the pledge, every area must have a comprehensive rough sleeping strategy. The challenge element, however, has allowed the people who put forward the best strategy to be the beneficiaries of the money. Sometimes the local authority has the best strategy, sometimes Shelter does. The important thing is that we have comprehensive anti-homelessness strategies throughout Scotland. The provider will not always be the same.

The rest of the money will go to prevent homelessness. I want to highlight the idea of rent deposit schemes. In last week's edition of *The Big Issue*, vendor after vendor talked about what the Aberdeen Cyrenians rent deposit scheme had done to help them re-establish homes. I want that sort of rent deposit scheme to operate across Scotland. A couple of years ago, I was invited to join a scheme to pool rent deposits for young people in my area who were facing homelessness. Other Scots need to have the same chance.

This is not just about new money for joined-up services; it is about joined-up action in government. It is about Susan Deacon, Jim Wallace and I working together to ensure that prisoners who are released from places such as Greenock do not fall into rough sleeping because they do not have the right support services when they enter the community. Special attention must be paid to the problem of young people leaving care. That problem, too, is highlighted extensively in last week's edition of *The Big Issue*. Sam Galbraith will make an announcement on that shortly.

This is not just about central government. Local government, housing, health, social work and the police services all need to do better. I raised this point with members of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the social affairs forum when I met them on Monday. They recognise the need for local authorities to develop comprehensive local homelessness strategies. As a first step, they agreed that I ask the homelessness task force today to consider the need to apply time limits to dealing with cases of rough sleepers. If the homelessness task force recommends time limits, we will include the necessary legislation in the homelessness bill. When it comes to rough sleeping, one extra night on the streets is one night too many.

Rough sleeping is in our sights as never before, but the broader issue of homelessness is the next challenge. Our homelessness legislation in Scotland is almost 20 years out of date. We measure the wrong things, in the wrong way, for the wrong reasons. We have acted swiftly, as Shelter—and other organisations—have requested. I draw Parliament's attention to Shelter's response to our green paper earlier this

year. Shelter proposed

"an initial six month period identifying and acting on urgent issues"

and then a longer phase

"of up to two years setting out a rolling programme of legislation and policy changes through to the second term of the Scottish Parliament."

I could not have put it better myself. In short, we need to take a long, hard look at the experiences and causes of homelessness and the remedies for it.

I say in all candour to the many committed campaigners in this chamber who would rush me to a solution—however well intended—that they risk, perhaps inadvertently, having neither the interests of the homeless nor of those who work on their behalf at heart. Good intentions are not enough in a Parliament. They can lead to ill-thought-through, piecemeal legislation. We need well-planned, effective legislation, fit for a new generation.

The task force has got off to a flying start. I want an initial report within six months and new legislation. However, where it is possible to act now, we will do so. The law governing mortgage repossessions is one such area. With a short, focused piece of conveyancing legislation, we can assist up to 3,000 Scottish families at risk of repossession. Cathie Craigie will prepare a bill with support from the Law Society. That is a huge step forward in the new politics.

**Fiona Hyslop** *rose*—

**Ms Alexander:** The bill is not a tired gesture, like a Westminster 10-minute rule bill, but new back-bench legislation prepared in a new way for a new Parliament.

**Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**Ms Alexander:** No, I am sorry, I need to finish.

Let me conclude by linking homelessness to the Government's wider housing agenda. One third of Scotland's homeless applicants come from Glasgow. In the new future of community ownership that we are offering to Glasgow's tenants, we must also meet the aspirations of the homeless people in that city. They are the new tenants of tomorrow.

Shelter and others have legitimately raised concerns that the creation of community ownership could leave councils with statutory obligations towards the homeless but without the homes to keep that promise. I can offer reassurance, however. If tenants in Glasgow—or anywhere else in Scotland—opt for a new future, I am determined that we will do whatever it takes, be it nomination agreements or new rules for new

landlords, to ensure that that city's homeless are housed.

I also take this opportunity to tell Parliament that I propose, with the city council's agreement, the establishment of a formal steering group to oversee the next phases of work to develop a transfer proposal. Such a steering group would include representatives of the Executive, the city council, Glasgow Alliance, Scottish Homes and the local housing association movement. However, at the end of the day, in Glasgow as elsewhere, the tenants alone will decide their future.

I have told the Parliament about the Executive's plans for tackling rough sleeping, for rethinking homelessness and for moving forward in Glasgow. New solutions are being put in place. Scotland deserves no less. That is what this Parliament and this Executive are all about.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Executive is fully committed to tackling the scourge of homelessness in Scotland by virtue of its pledge in the Programme for Government that it will ensure that no-one has to sleep rough by 2003; by providing new accommodation and better support services, and by the establishment of a Task Force to (a) review the causes and nature of homelessness in Scotland, (b) examine current practice in dealing with cases of homelessness, and (c) make recommendations on how homelessness in Scotland can be best prevented and, where it does occur, tackled effectively.

15:58

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** I welcome the minister's statement, as new resources in this area are always welcome. The Scottish National party is pleased to note that the Executive occasionally listens to the Opposition and that, to some small degree, the minister has listened to our call for an increase in public spending on housing. We are also happy to support the announcement made on Tuesday, which echoes the key manifesto pledges that we made in May, in particular on a rural rent deposit scheme that was mentioned.

In all sincerity, however, announcements such as the one made by the minister would be better made in this chamber at debates such as this. As a member of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, I have yet to receive a paper detailing where the extra money will be spent. Bearing in mind that the Scottish Executive's website has crashed, we cannot be expected to get information about such announcements there.

The Minister for Communities has identified her main priorities. Our amendment seeks to do two key things: to put the homelessness issue into the proper context and to ask members for their support in bringing forward the Executive's

timetable for housing legislation. I will deal with each in turn.

The SNP is concerned that the debate on homelessness has centred around solely the issue of rooflessness. It is with some concern that we hear the minister talking about moving homelessness away from housing. Yes, we recognise that there is a social dimension to homelessness. However, we should be warned about the distinctive move that the Executive seems to be making on this issue; it is a move that we must view with deep concern.

The Scottish Executive's announcement of key schemes, such as the rent deposit scheme, is a small step on the way to recognising that there is more to homelessness than sleeping rough. The SNP is also pleased that the Executive is listening to the experts in the field and realising that more needs to be done on the causes of homelessness. According to the Chartered Institute of Housing, evictions and exclusions from housing need are among the main causes of social exclusion. Yet the Scottish Executive does not keep any central record of exclusions for rent arrears or for anti-social behaviour. In England, Shelter estimates that local authorities are excluding around 200,000 people from council waiting lists and allocations, largely due to rent arrears.

The result is that we have no real statistical base from which to calculate the position or to identify where rises in homelessness occur. We have no way of tracking when large jumps in homelessness take place, or of finding out the causes of those jumps. For example, we know that from 1986 to 1987 in the Highlands 619 households applied to local authorities as homeless households. In the last 10 years, there has been a jump of 130 per cent. There is no statistical evidence by which we can measure whether, during that time, housing authorities in the Highlands and Islands had increased eviction levels. There are no centrally held statistics on the number of people who were excluded from applying to a particular authority in the Highlands and Islands. I am aware that the Executive plans to publish statistics on evictions from April 2000 and I welcome those plans. However, we require information on what has happened over the past 10 years.

Apart from the lack of information, there are further aspects of homelessness that we must consider. We have yet to have a comprehensive policy on homelessness that deals with issues of hidden homelessness. I understand that there is a review, but we will not receive the report of that review until spring next year. We must move swiftly on this issue. I recognise the points that the minister made earlier, but we must acknowledge that there is more to homelessness than the issue

of rough sleeping. We must examine the backlog of house adaptations for people with disabilities. There are people who live with family or friends, and who are unable to move into their own home because of a lack of suitable accommodation. Such circumstances are part of recognising that housing is very much a part of homelessness. Hidden homelessness includes the thousands of older people who cannot move out of NHS hospitals, as there is no suitable accommodation for them. We heard earlier today that there is no commitment to look at resources for women who flee domestic violence, which is one of the most acute forms of housing need. We must address that issue. Every year, 24,000 children are made homeless in Scotland.

On the point about joined-up Government, we need housing legislation, but we need it sooner rather than later. It was with great disappointment that the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee heard about the Executive's commitment to introduce a bill in mid-2000, rather than in early 2000. That is not good enough. We need a housing bill during this millennium, not during the next millennium. We must ensure that, if the Executive is to move on stock transfer, we protect the rights of tenants. Contracts are all very well, but we need statutory instruments.

**Ms Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab):** With all due respect to Fiona, she must distinguish between her view of what happened at the committee meeting and the decisions that the committee made. It was not the unanimous view of the committee members that they were disappointed with the time scale of the housing legislation. She may have been disappointed, but the committee did not come to that decision.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I thank Margaret. I recognise that, as the committee's convener, she ensures that we hold collective discussions on this issue. I am sure that she would echo my earlier point, which she made very well during the committee meeting, that announcements such as the one that was made on Tuesday should be made first to the committee.

On housing legislation, we must examine seriously the Executive's radical changes, such as the decision to conduct a mass sell-off of council houses without offering people the protection that is required in law for the homeless. Local councils are best placed to deal with the social aspects that the minister mentioned. They are in the lead position to look after our housing interests. The Scottish Executive, and the Minister for Communities in particular, should require the homeless review to be completed by Christmas, and the Executive should introduce legislation in the next three months, rather than in the next nine months. Let the draft bill be published for

consideration within that time scale. Let us have a firm commitment.

I seek support for this amendment for two reasons. First, we must recognise that homelessness is not just about rough sleeping, regardless of what the Executive says, although rough sleeping is an important problem that must be addressed and the resources are welcome. Secondly, we need housing legislation. If there is one issue on which the people who elected us to this place want us to take action, it is housing. It is a disgrace that we will have to wait until the next millennium for legislation.

I move, as an amendment to motion S1M-154, in the name of Ms Wendy Alexander, to leave out from "the Scottish" to end and insert

"tackling homelessness is one of the major challenges facing it, that it supports the Rough Sleepers Initiative and welcomes the Scottish Executive's continuing support for it, and that it recognises that rough sleeping is only one aspect of homelessness and that any initiative designed to tackle it can only deal with the reality of rough sleeping not the causes behind it; calls upon the Scottish Executive to make the newly established Homelessness Taskforce a priority and to bring forward early measures to deal with the causes of homelessness, new regulations to help homeless people and new legislative proposals to bring homelessness legislation up to date; believes that Executive time is required for early legislation to deal with homelessness and housing in general, and calls upon the Scottish Executive to bring forward the proposed publishing date of a draft housing bill to the end of 1999."

16:05

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** This is an important debate, and one that extends well beyond the confines of this Parliament. That is a good thing. We should involve as many people as possible in the decisions that must be made. I hope, however, that the debate will not go on for too long. There are important issues to be decided, and urgent issues that must be addressed.

It would be churlish of me to accuse the minister and her colleagues of complacency. They have, after all, held their present remits for only four months. They are, however, members of the Labour party which in the general election of 1997 pledged to tackle the scourge of homelessness. The net effect of their efforts has been pitiful, frankly, and there has been a heartbreaking increase in the number of homeless persons.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Bill Aitken:** There are 32,400 new homeless people, representing a 6 per cent increase. That is the fact, and Labour members must live with that. I will give way.

**Johann Lamont:** Does Mr Aitken agree that

there is lot of evidence to suggest a direct link between deprivation, unemployment and homelessness? It took the Tories 18 years to create the crisis in homelessness, and you have the audacity to stand there and say that it has taken us two years to address the problem. I am amazed that I can even find the words to condemn you for saying such a thing. I hope that you will support the measures that have been proposed and perhaps will make some positive suggestions about how they can be moved forward.

**Bill Aitken:** Ah, I hear what the lady has to say. Is it not the case that the commonwealth ceased to exist on 7 April 1979 and began again on 1 May 1997? For how much longer do she and her colleagues think that they will get away with blaming the Labour Government—the Conservative Government? [*Laughter.*] It was John Major. It was Margaret Thatcher. Are we to go back to the days of Stanley Baldwin? Benjamin Disraeli? The fact of the matter is that there has been a Labour Government in power for almost two-and-a-half years and nothing has happened on the issue of homelessness, to the extent that there has been a substantial and dramatic increase in the number of people suffering. That is the blunt truth. The sooner that she and her colleagues accept it, the sooner we will be able to progress the situation.

**Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)** *rose*—

**Bill Aitken:** Now, with respect, I will continue in a more constructive vein. The task force will face a number of issues, but we already know the answers to some of the questions that the task force will ask. We know that there is a lack of liaison between different agencies, housing and social work being the most evident. We know that the existing system of discharge from prisons, hospitals and other institutions results in a lot of people going straight into rough sleeping. We know that that is the situation and that we are required to address it. What should we be doing about it? There was not much in what the minister said that convinced me that we have an answer to that particular problem yet.

I suggest closer liaison with local authorities. The leaders of councils should be invited here to discuss the matter. They are the people at the sharp end of this issue, and we could then move it forward. We should also consult with building societies and other mortgage lenders. Repossession should be the very last option that they should consider. I am disappointed that the minister did not put her full weight behind the proposals that sheriffs in Scotland should have similar powers to county court judges in England and be able to stay repossession orders. That would have been a helpful gesture. I welcome

Cathy Craigie's member's bill on that, but I would have looked for it to have been boosted by the Executive. I am sad that that was not included in the SNP amendment.

One of the major problems facing us is support for those holding first-time tenancies. It is all very well throwing money at rough sleeping initiatives and it is all very well putting people into houses, but if they cannot cope with living in houses we will be back at square one very quickly. We must examine the fact that many of those whom we take off the streets to put into houses lead disoriented and disordered lives. They should really have much more support than is given to them. I look forward to the minister or the deputy minister coming forward in due course with clear and concise ideas as to how this problem will be addressed.

Joined-up seems to be one of the buzzwords around here, but I am sure that we all agree that one of the saddest things that happens is that many of the major issues that this Parliament is required to address are impinged upon by the problem of drugs. The task force has already come up with the self-evident fact that the profile of those who are sleeping rough is completely different to the profile of those sleeping rough a generation ago. The average age is now much younger. Of course, drugs have caused that. We will have that problem until the Executive comes forward with concise and clear views on what it will do regarding the drugs menace generally.

**Tricia Marwick:** I agree with Mr Aitken that the age of those sleeping rough on the streets has fallen, but will he accept that there are young people on the streets as a direct result of changes in housing benefit and other benefits for 16 to 18-year-olds, which were brought in by the Conservative Government in the late 1980s?

**Bill Aitken:** The working of those regulations may have given some cause for concern, but the basic problem cannot be denied. That problem is drugs and the increase in addiction to drugs.

**Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** Does not Mr Aitken agree that the Government's botched community care legislation, which put so many mentally handicapped people on to the streets, has also had a major effect on homelessness over the few years?

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Wind up as you answer, Mr Aitken.

**Bill Aitken:** Mr Gibson will be aware that statistics do not bear out that opinion.

Frankly, there is much in the ministerial statement that is to be welcomed, but it is sadly short on detail. I accept that that is inevitable at this stage, but we must examine the problem.

Labour cannot lock itself away from the fact that it has been in power for two and a half years and nothing has happened.

The statistics that I quoted are damning. Much of Scotland's youth is suffering. They would not have suffered under the housing policy of the Conservative Government, which—under the caring and imaginative leadership of my friend Lord James Douglas-Hamilton—ensured that nothing of this magnitude happened to people in this country.

**The Presiding Officer:** We now move to the open part of the debate. Members will restrict their remarks to four minutes. Many members wish to take part in what is obviously an important debate, so it will be helpful if members try to abide by the time limit.

16:14

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** I welcome many aspects of the minister's statement. I will, in passing, mention a statistic from the period between 1979 and 1996—the last Conservative regime. In that time around 500,000 mortgage holders were repossessed in the United Kingdom as a whole. That puts in perspective what we are talking about today and the challenge that we must face.

Homelessness is a multi-faceted problem both in its causes and consequences. Marital household break-up, lack of suitable housing, moving out of care and out of institutions—which has been touched on—and drug and alcohol problems have all played their part in the creation of the crisis. The raw figures are horrific. In 1986-87, 25,189 households in Scotland presented themselves to councils as homeless, or as potentially so. Last year, the figure was 43,051. In rural areas, as was touched on before, the problem is smaller in terms of numbers, but bigger in proportion. The figures that Fiona Hyslop mentioned, which were, I think, originally obtained by Fergus Ewing, referred to a rise of 130 per cent in the Highlands and Islands.

In sheer numbers and size, the problem in Glasgow dominates the national picture: the 1986-87 figure of 5,705 applicants rose to 12,665 last year, four times the number for our nearest rival—if rival is the right word in this context. There are strange oddities in the statistics. Why, for example, do little more than a quarter of Glasgow applicants get assessed as being in priority need, compared with two thirds in Edinburgh and the Scottish average of around a third?

A sevenfold increase in the presentation of priority cases in a 10-year period under the category of mental illness is notable. It does not seem to be particularly linked to the introduction of care in the community. A fourfold statistical

increase in "other special reasons" also merits attention.

The reasons given for homelessness are equally interesting. A doubling of priority cases arising from violent disputes with spouses echoes the debate that we had on 2 September on domestic violence. The large increase in cases involving people who have been discharged from institutions or resulting from actions by landlords—because, for example, of rent arrears—is also worthy of major consideration. It is odd that rent arrears evictions are relatively small compared with other actions by landlords. That contradicts the experience of courts that rent arrears are by far the commonest cause of court actions for repossession, and suggests that people do not wait for court action, but anticipate it, and are therefore moonlighters.

There is a strong, growing sense of purpose and dedication among the Executive and in this Parliament in getting to grips with this matter—it is important that that is the case. We should not, in that context, understate the importance of the commitment of the partnership Executive to the objective that no one should have to sleep rough by 2003, or the commitment to housing legislation next year. The existing law, largely contained in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 1988, inherited a long tail of past regimes and complicated terminology. It is extremely specialised, and I doubt that the draftsmen will be heavily challenged in modernising it, particularly if the single social tenancy concept is to be pursued.

The Minister for Communities will not, therefore, be surprised to hear that I think that the Scottish Executive has perhaps lost the opportunity to support my proposed member's bill on the prevention of homelessness and to secure legislation on measures that have broad agreement—echoing what Bill Aitken said before—a full year in advance of the main bill.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Does Robert Brown agree that the introduction of suspended repossession orders could easily be done as part of the feudal bill, as presented by the Executive, to amend the Conveyancing and Feudal Reform (Scotland) Act 1970, and that we do not need a member's bill, which takes up this Parliament's time, when the Executive can achieve the same thing in its own time?

**Robert Brown:** I accept that concept, but it is a broader matter. Similar issues apply to how we deal with evictions from tenancy cases, and a series of reforms concerning the need for permanent accommodation, the reversal of earlier judgments, the new social tenancies and so on is long overdue.

I do not want to hold up the chamber on this matter, but I think that there is broad support among all parties for proceeding, as Shelter and other organisations have asked us to do, with a range of reforms that can be dealt with now, and which will allow the homelessness task force to concentrate on the more central issues, including the rough sleepers initiative. I hope that the Executive and the Parliament will still give a fair wind to my member's bill when it goes forward—it has been lodged.

The Liberal Democrats have a long track record on homelessness. The original Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 was a private member's bill from the Liberal MP, Stephen Ross. It passed into law as part of the original Lib-Lab pact. We have long argued for a number of the things that we have heard about today on the need to reduce the level of unnecessarily empty houses, rent deposit schemes and the like.

It is important for the Executive not to take a possessive attitude towards legislation through this Parliament and for there to be a reasonable balance between the rights of the Executive to pursue its legislation and the rights of committees and back benchers to examine the details of the proposed legislation and put forward their own ideas. We need a unified effort on this matter, and it is unfortunate that the Executive has not taken on board the opportunity to introduce some complementary measures, which would assist its whole programme. Against that background and with those comments, I support the motion.

16:20

**Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab):** This is an important debate and the number of people who want to speak indicates that—but that is not to say that Bill Aitken's levity was not welcome.

It is unfortunate, however, that some of the Scottish National party's old attitudes are still evident in the amendment that we are considering. In tackling homelessness, we should be moving forward on a broader base, and no party has a monopoly on hand wringing and concern. To suggest that the Scottish National party has answers that the coalition parties do not have is, quite frankly, wrong.

I regret the fact that the amendment ends by calling on the Executive

“to bring forward the proposed publishing date of a draft housing bill to the end of 1999.”

Can that amendment have been lodged by the same Scottish National party that, two weeks ago, accused the coalition of acting too quickly on mental health legislation, saying that more consideration was needed and that, if we legislate at haste, we will repent at leisure?

The timetable for the homelessness task force and the housing green paper is set out. We have said so half a dozen times in the past few months, and I do not know how many times we need to say it again before it gets through to Fiona Hyslop, but that is why there is no housing bill in the legislative programme at the moment.

The same is true of the mass sell-off of council houses. I do not deny that the transfer of housing stock has implications for homeless people. Of course it has. At yesterday morning's meeting of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, Fiona Hyslop, Alex Neil and Lloyd Quinan were all there when the minister spoke about housing stock transfer.

**Mr Quinan:** Will Mr Watson give way?

**Mike Watson:** She could not have been more explicit in telling people what was involved, but we still get the same old arguments.

**Mr Quinan:** Will the noble lord give way?

**Mike Watson:** Yes, why not?

**Mr Quinan:** Does Mr Watson acknowledge that the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee agreed yesterday that ministerial statements that directly affect the committee are unacceptable if they are not delivered in front of the committee, and that the committee was unanimous in that agreement?

**Mike Watson:** I agree with that decision, but that was not what I thought Lloyd Quinan would ask about. If I had known that that was his point, I would not have given way. He should try to follow the debate more closely.

It is crucial to establish one thing about this issue. I may have misheard Fiona Hyslop, and I am sure that she will tell me if I did, but I think that she said that she did not want the debate to move away from being centred on housing. The minister's opening remarks were perfectly clear, and Fiona Hyslop and her party seem to be going against the grain of what Shelter—probably the most respected organisation in the field—has to say. In its response to the housing green paper, Shelter has said that there is no doubt that it is not just a question of housing, and that social policy, welfare policy and economic policy are also involved. Unless all those things are wrapped up and put together to form a response to the problem, the debate cannot advance and we will not be able to help homeless people. Homeless people and those whom the agencies in the field are trying to help will not be grateful to us for squabbling across the chamber while they want the debate to progress.

It is unfortunate that all members cannot recognise the fact that the homelessness task force has been established. The amendment calls

on the Executive to make the homelessness task force a priority. It is a priority. It has been established and has had its first meeting. Just look at the people who are involved. There are representatives from Shelter, *The Big Issue*, the Scottish Council for Single Homeless and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, as well as academics and local authorities. What more does Fiona Hyslop want?

Those people must be given time to consider the issue in its widest form. The papers from the first meeting have been circulated to all members, so SNP members know the ground that is being covered. Why should we try to rush out the bill by the end of the year? What would be the virtue in that? There is a lot of meat to get into and a lot of work to be done before the recommendations are published. Together with a response to the green paper on housing, those recommendations will inform the debate.

We know about the rough sleepers initiative, the grants to voluntary bodies, the empty homes initiative and the hostel revenue grants. People should recognise that all those things are being done to tackle homelessness. The fact that the timing of the programme is the only objection that the SNP can trot out signifies that there is not much more that could be done and that it is simply a question of timing. The people who suffer homelessness in its various forms deserve a response from this Parliament that will have support across the parties and does not degenerate into a debate about how fast things are being done.

There will be a housing bill. There will be legislation in this chamber at the first available opportunity after the green paper and the homelessness task force have been fully considered. That is the way forward and all parties should unite in responding to the problem, so that what eventually emerges from the Parliament has the support of all parties. That way we can seriously tackle the blight of homelessness in this country.

16:25

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** I would like to express my support for the rough sleepers initiative and I welcome the minister's announcement yesterday that she will find a further £6 million to fund it. It is not surprising that I would say that—when I worked for Shelter, I campaigned for a rough sleepers initiative. The initiative was first introduced in 1989 in London, but it was not until winter 1996 that Michael Forsyth agreed that we needed a rough sleepers initiative in Scotland. That was because of the shaming spectacle of people dying on our streets, which I think shocked even Michael Forsyth into

action.

I share Fiona Hyslop's concern that the Executive is trying to redefine homelessness. Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness, but it is not the only form. Wendy Alexander was reported in the press today as saying that rough sleeping was not a housing problem. If the press report was accurate and that is what she thinks, she does not understand how homelessness occurs.

Of course rough sleeping is a housing problem. It is also a poverty issue. Government policies are responsible for the increase in rough sleeping in Scotland. The most recent statistics indicate that around 1,000 people sleep rough on the streets of Scotland every night of the year. Ten years ago we rarely saw people sleeping rough, except for a hard core—usually old men with an alcohol problem. The increase in rough sleeping in Scotland in the late 1980s can be traced back to three factors: the removal of benefits for 16 to 18-year-olds; the reduction in the amount of money for council housing; and care in the community, which was underfunded and left vulnerable people without the support needed to sustain their tenancies. Every one of those three factors was a Tory policy; every one of them was opposed by Labour in opposition; every one of them is embraced by new Labour in government.

We need a commitment from the Executive to tackle not only rough sleeping, but homelessness in its wider sense. That means money to build new homes and to improve damp homes and houses that are lying empty because councils do not have the money—

**Ms Alexander:** Does Tricia Marwick acknowledge that youth unemployment has halved in Scotland in the past two years, which shows that one of the problems that she cites is being dealt with? Given the need for new investment, does she support our plans for community ownership in Glasgow, which would bring investment of around £1,000 million to the city?

**Tricia Marwick:** I accept that young people are being put on to new deal programmes, but I am sure that the minister would agree that there are still 16 and 18-year-olds who are excluded from all benefits and who are destitute. On Glasgow, if the minister genuinely wants to ensure that all our people are housed, she must ensure that there is Government money as well as private finance. In the first three years of the Labour Government, less has been spent on housing than the Tories spent in their final three years—there is no point in the minister shaking her head at that.

We have record levels of homelessness, record housing waiting lists and the lowest amount of money spent on council housing in Scotland since

the war. That is a disgrace. If the Executive is serious about tackling homelessness, it must find the money for housing. It is not enough to help people who are on the streets. We must ensure that people do not end up on the streets in the first place and we need to make sure that they have long-term or permanent homes.

Much good work has been done in the voluntary sector but much more needs to be done. As Wendy said, some local authorities still do not have a rough sleeping strategy and it is only fairly recently that some councils have even acknowledged that they have rough sleepers in their area. The rough sleepers initiative will not succeed without a commitment to a wider housing policy and a social security system that does not leave young people destitute.

Those points must be taken on board if we really want nobody to be sleeping rough on our streets by 2003. We must look at the wider issues if we are to make representation for the young people who have no money to live on.

16:30

**Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab):** It has been raining for most of the day. When I walked up to Parliament this morning, I passed a bench on which a young man, huddled up in old dirty clothes, was fast asleep in the rain. The bench was not far away from the Department of Social Security office. No doubt he will be appearing there today to try to get some benefit and support to help him to eke out what is obviously a miserable existence. We should try to be conscious of young men such as him when we have this debate.

When Wendy Alexander was asked to give her top priority as a minister, I was delighted that she picked helping young men like that. I am less than delighted about the way in which this debate has developed into the kind of party political knockabout that is so reminiscent of Westminster.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green)** *rose—*

**Mr McAllion:** I am sorry. I do not have time. A lot of people want to speak.

I was disappointed by the cheap point scoring. We told the homeless, "Wait until we get a Scottish Parliament. It will be different then." Judging by the SNP contributions this afternoon, people may think that it is not different. I see the same cheap party political point scoring that went on at Westminster and which does nothing for the homeless.

The SNP is right in some ways. The young man who was lying on that bench is the visible tip of a big iceberg. He is the rough sleeper on the streets. The rough sleepers initiative will, I hope, get

people off the streets by the Executive's target date, but of course the larger part of the iceberg is out of sight. It comprises the hidden homeless who are not on the streets: the people who are living in rooms in what used to be hotels but which have, in effect, now become refugee camps funded by the DSS; the people who move from house to house and sleep on their friends' floors and couches because they do not have a house of their own; the families who are living in quiet desperation in cramped conditions with their relatives because they have no access to housing.

The Scottish Executive recognises those problems. That is why it established the homelessness task force. What I like about the homelessness task force is that, in setting it up, the Scottish Executive has implicitly admitted that it does not have all the answers, unlike some of the parties that have contributed to this debate and think that they do. The Scottish Executive recognises that there are people who know more than it does; people from Shelter, *The Big Issue*, the Scottish Council for Single Homeless and others who are on the homelessness task force.

The Shelter submission to the task force recognises that even the experts do not know all the answers. Shelter wants the task force to consult widely, particularly among the homeless themselves, before it returns to the Executive with its recommendations. That is exactly the right way in which to proceed. The SNP amendment is exactly the wrong way in which to proceed, and all the professionals tell us that. Of course, there are issues that as politicians we can identify, but as party politicians and civil servants we know nothing about homelessness, so we should listen to those who do.

I appeal to all those who will vote on this motion to unite behind the Executive, because it is correct on this matter. It is listening to and acting in liaison with the housing lobby and is talking to the homeless to try to get this package right. Wendy was correct when she said that rough sleeping was not just about being homeless and that being homeless was not just about not having a house; there are a hundred other reasons why people are homeless. We must examine all of them and join them up with solutions that will be practical, will work and will help the homeless; we must not indulge in the sort of cheap political point scoring that we have heard this afternoon.

16:34

**Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I welcome the fact that the minister has made homelessness a priority commitment and that the Executive has put it firmly on the agenda. It is particularly pleasing to see that, as Tricia Marwick pointed out, the Executive intends to

continue to use the rough sleepers initiative and other policies that were introduced by the Conservative Government.

We are a little disappointed that the target date to resolve rough sleeping has been extended. Rough sleeping is only one aspect of the problem. I note that a task force is to be set up to examine the causes and nature of homelessness, but trust that that will not delay the problem being addressed at an early date.

Homelessness is a complex problem brought about by circumstances in an individual's life, so there is no one solution to it. Many rough sleepers have a complex set of problems to resolve—drink, drugs, violence or family breakdown. They require medium-term support after accessing help through a hostel or other service gateway.

Conservatives believe that the Labour Government has missed the opportunity to use the most recent rounds of rough sleepers initiative money to provide extra supported accommodation to help those moving from hostels into longer-term accommodation. Without such support, many homeless people are unable to cope in mainstream housing and return to the streets or to hostels. The inability to cope without support causes them to suffer further and may cause other problems in the estates in which they are housed—they may behave in a challenging manner that their neighbours deem anti-social, or they may fall into debt through difficulties in paying their rent or other bills.

**Robin Harper:** Will Mr Harding give way?

**Mr Harding:** I would normally give way, but I have got only three minutes.

Short-term support, help with furniture and long-term advice are required if we are to end the misery of homelessness and the problems faced by neighbourhoods in peripheral housing estates, where some homeless people find themselves dumped without the help or resources to make a home.

I trust that the Executive will consider setting targets for local authorities to reduce homelessness, and in so doing identify and introduce best practice throughout Scotland in a determined effort to resolve this increasing problem. Conservatives are serious about the issue; we want to be constructive and will work with all parties to address the problem. On this occasion, we will support the SNP amendment, as we believe that it gives the necessary urgency to this Parliament's approach to housing issues.

16:37

**Ms Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab):** The new politics must be with us, as the

Tories are supporting the SNP and dare to lecture us about homelessness. I have heard it all now.

I must express some disappointment. As Convener of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, I have gone out of my way to make clear to members of that committee that we do not regard any one party as having a monopoly on good intentions and commitment on this issue. I am disappointed that that has not been echoed throughout the chamber.

We wish that the minister would come to the committee with her announcements, not least because I think that she has something substantial to say, which should be brought to the committee. However, that is hardly the most profound criticism of a Government that I have heard.

It is important that we welcome the establishment of the task force on homelessness and the Executive's explicit commitments on the rough sleepers initiative. It is vital that we give credit to ministerial commitment to action—rather than sloganising and good will—that will be monitored and measured by outcome. That is a welcome development in government, not just on homelessness but across the board. Some of us have argued for some time that we must deal with the complexities of homelessness, as its impact and causes are varied in relation to individuals, families and communities. The indications are that the task force will recognise that and consider the different responses and strategies that are required to meet those different needs.

From the minister's paperwork, I see that she is examining recent research and the variety of supported accommodation projects. We need a variety of accommodation to meet the variety of needs.

As Convener of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, I welcome the fact that the minister has made it clear that rooflessness is not the only problem and that the problems that we face are interconnected. We cannot separate measures to deal with homelessness from strategies on drug addiction, violence and family breakdown.

I make one plea about family breakdown. We often hear simplistic debate about it, because too often it is discussed as though young people leave their families because they are weak and incapable of managing the situation in which they find themselves. Many young people leave their families for logical reasons. If members examine statistics and stories about child abuse and sexual abuse, they will understand how many vulnerable young people find themselves in such situations. I welcome the fact that the task force will examine that issue in depth.

I have recently heard compelling evidence from

young people, their families and professionals about the problems that are faced. There is a continuum of experience—some of the homeless population can be supported into a framework of stability and progress. However, I hope that this Parliament will give particular attention to young people with significant problems. I welcome the minister's comments on young people who experience difficulty on leaving care. They may have had profoundly traumatic experiences and may find it very difficult to sustain a tenancy. We need a substantial package of intervention to deal with that problem. I hope that the committee's work on the drugs issue and the inquiry that we intend to hold will make a contribution to the homelessness debate.

The Parliament should give some attention to the need for a comprehensive youth strategy that considers all young people's needs. I make a plea for those who are most marginalised and most disengaged—they must command our attention.

I am particularly concerned about the increasing number of young people who are being taken into care in Glasgow, which goes against the national trend. Clearly, that is related to issues of exclusion and disadvantage, particularly drug misuse. To echo a point that John McAllion made in committee, the cities of Scotland bear a particularly heavy burden in this respect. For example, the Glasgow drug crisis centre costs the city council and the health board £1 million a year to run, but the latest figures indicate that more than 10 per cent of the people who use the service come from outwith Glasgow. We have to consider the distribution of support to the cities and recognise that cities, especially Glasgow, are at the sharp end of these problems. That should be reflected in the financial support that they receive.

I do not doubt that there is a desire throughout this chamber to deal with homelessness. We must realise that it is time to create a constructive dialogue and to engage with workers on the ground and those who experience the problem. I believe that the task force is the first step in that direction. The agencies have a palpable sense of hope that we are beginning to move on this issue. They do not offer us uncritical support, nor should they; we, for our part, will not be uncritical of the services that young people are offered. However, it is time for the Parliament to make its presence felt and to begin to concentrate on what it can do, rather than on what it cannot. There is a sense that we can bring about real change. I hope that we will support the Executive when it is doing good work.

16:42

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I am surprised that the likes of John, Margaret and Mike

have a problem with our amendment, which welcomes the rough sleepers initiative, the establishment of a task force and the fact that this matter will be a priority. The amendment also expresses concerns that have been expressed by people outside this chamber who are living rough and by others who are homeless but not living rough. They have seen committees come and go; they are fed up with committees taking minutes and wasting years. Our concern is that the establishment of a task force and of another committee for Glasgow should not become an excuse for a lack of early action to deal with the problem of rough sleepers and homelessness.

There is a general consensus in this chamber that this is a complex issue. The causes of homelessness and rooflessness are complex—they include drugs, the breakdown of homes, poverty and unemployment. We will probably not solve the problem of homelessness until we have tackled all those problems as well. However, there is a fundamental issue at stake here—that there are certain actions within the remit of both the Scottish Executive and the UK Government that can be taken to alleviate the situation.

Let me deal with the issue of benefits, which is directly related to poverty. I can quote speeches that Mike and John made in the House of Commons, in which they said that one of the root causes of poverty among young people—of young people being forced to live in cardboard city in London—was the Tories' withdrawal about 10 years ago of benefit to 16 and 17-year-olds. Surely, one of the things that this Parliament and this Executive can do is to put pressure on what is supposed to be a Labour Government in London to restore that benefit, as we agree that that is one of the main reasons for young people sleeping rough.

Consider some of the other changes that have been made, such as the one to housing benefit as it relates to single-room rent. That change affected 80 per cent of the young people in Scotland and forced many of them on to the street. The purpose of that change, which was made by the Tories and which was criticised by John McAllion and every other Labour politician, was to save £65 million a year, £6 million of which was being spent in Scotland. It is ironic that the £6 million that was saved equals the £6 million that has been announced for the rough sleepers initiative. There is no point in giving with one hand and taking away with the other.

With all due respect to John, he was talking rubbish when he said that we do not know anything about the problem. Of course we do. Nobody has the solution, but we should all be agreed that the one way of tackling homelessness at its root is to give back to young people the

benefits that they have been robbed of. Why is righting the wrongs of the Tories not part of the Executive's agenda as well as taking the necessary action to address homelessness in Scotland?

16:47

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** Tackling homelessness is one of the most important challenges for the millennium. We have heard many good speeches on the subject this afternoon. I particularly welcome Wendy Alexander's commitment to support the bill that will deal with repossession. We see that bill as a major step forward.

I would like to correct a statement that appeared in *The Herald* of 16 September. Paul Brown, of the Scottish Association of Law Centres, said:

"I don't think that Wendy Alexander really understands the issue."

If I may say so, she has put that right this afternoon.

As Margaret Curran said, the causes of homelessness are complex. They are also many and diverse. Some years ago, when I was housing minister, I learned that a large number of young Scots who were sleeping on the streets of London had been taken into a hostel in Soho. The location of the hostel—which was professionally run—did not put me off visiting it and I am glad to report that the civil servants whom I took with me showed no untoward interest in the surroundings. I met a young boy from Edinburgh who said that he had been treated extremely unkindly by his stepfather, which was why he had been sleeping rough in London.

The causes of homelessness include harassment, mental illness, eviction—which Fiona Hyslop spoke about—alcohol and drug problems, and an inability to cope on release from prison. About two thirds of those who are classed as homeless give as their reason for being homeless a dispute with their partner or the unwillingness of friends or family to accommodate them.

How effectively a nation deals with its homeless is a measure of its civilisation. Homelessness must be a national priority, so I welcome the creation of the task force, but the Executive must not forget to give it a budget. I also invite the minister to confirm that stock transfers will take account of homelessness issues.

There is a vital need for a package of measures, which is why Margaret Curran called for a comprehensive youth strategy, for example. It is not enough to have special allocations for local authorities that submit bids for good projects through the rough sleepers initiative, whether

those projects are to create more hostels, to bring empty houses back into use or to create more move-on accommodation—although, as Tricia Marwick said, it is vital that we have permanent housing for people to move into. Homelessness needs a comprehensive approach.

I welcome the support given by the minister to voluntary organisations such as Shelter, the Churches and charities. I know that, because the charity Borderline received grant funding of £72,300 this year, it was able to make 230 placements in hostels. It also issued 317 travel warrants and 396 birth certificates to enable people to prove their identities to obtain hostel beds, although it is a sad state of affairs when people have to establish their identity through birth certificates.

Mike Watson mentioned the role of Shelter. I am proud to have been able to give it a grant of more than £90,000 to help to set up a homeless persons legal advisory service, which I am sure is doing an extremely good job.

In conclusion, I invite the Minister for Communities to introduce the rough sleepers initiative throughout Scotland as soon as possible. We see that as a top priority.

16:50

**Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the Executive's contribution to dealing with the problem of homelessness. The extra money is wonderful. It represents a commitment to dealing with something that is not so much a scourge on our streets as—now that we are entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century—a disgrace. I grew up in Edinburgh; in the 1960s, people chose to sleep in the streets. They no longer choose to; they are forced to. I welcome without equivocation the contribution of the Minister for Communities.

However, there are many concerns. Some of them have been articulated by my colleagues this afternoon, some by organisations in the voluntary sector and some by homeless and roofless people themselves. The first concern relates to a statement attributed to the Minister for Communities in today's edition of *The Herald*. She is reported as saying that homelessness

"is not a problem about housing; this is not a problem about bricks and mortar".

**Ms Alexander:** Will Mr Quinan give way?

**Mr Quinan:** Not at the moment, Wendy.

There is concern at Ms Alexander's suggestion that the assessment of homeless people in Glasgow had turned up a number of statistics on drug and alcohol abuse. Which is the chicken and which is the egg? She might be making a judgment on that a little too early.

Some of the other concerns relate to how core Government policy will impact on homelessness, especially when policies superficially seem to be related to the Immigration and Asylum Bill, the sex offenders register and the review of supported accommodation costs via housing benefit. I am sure that Ms Alexander will understand what I am saying, as it relates to her presentation to the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee yesterday. A strategic view has to be taken and—as my colleague Mr Neil suggested—central Government has to be consulted. The dis-United Kingdom Government could be very useful in that area.

I entirely accept Ms Alexander's commitment to consider provision, but we are concerned about it, whichever form—stock transfer or community ownership—it takes over the years. However, I suggest that the offer from Shelter in the proposal for the consultation programme be accepted. It may be useful to use such a body to organise things and to give a sense of a bridge between the Executive and the people. Shelter is the most experienced body in its field. It has been suggested that the consultation process should be designed to ensure that people feel able to raise issues that lie well outside the traditional confines of housing policy. It is vital that Ms Alexander takes that advice.

To reiterate what my colleagues have said, we are a little sad that there is no housing bill and we are slightly concerned that the Executive might make use of members' bills to pass legislation. However, that is a separate issue.

I was incredibly struck by one thing that Ms Alexander said. I am not trying to top John McAllion, but this morning I deliberately walked here from the top of Easter Road—near the bottom of the Royal Mile—and went in and out some of the closes on the way. I came across 19 people sleeping rough. If one walks down Advocate's Close on the way to Waverley station, one will see the most perfectly worked out little bedsit in an arch at the side of a building.

Wendy said that one night of rough sleeping is one night too many. If she fully believes that, I suggest that instead of waiting for the task force to report in six months, she should take emergency action now. It can be done. The Executive must take people off the streets now—while the consultation is going on and while the task force is at work—so that they are not sleeping on the streets during the winter. I commend the amendment to the chamber.

16:55

**The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie):** This debate has highlighted the problems

of homelessness in Scotland, from homelessness that we do not see—families sharing houses, friends sleeping on floors—to the most obvious and extreme example of people sleeping in doorways and parks in the cold and the wet, as Lloyd Quinan has described. If this Government is successfully to address the problems of those who are excluded from society, it must address the most extreme form of exclusion, which is exclusion from a home.

I recognise Tricia Marwick's deep personal commitment to this issue. I assure her that we recognise that homelessness is much more than rough sleeping.

Homelessness is a top priority for this Government. We have set ourselves a tough target: to ensure that, by the end of this parliamentary session, no one has to sleep rough. However, we believe that that is achievable and we are taking action to ensure that it is achieved.

That is why we have earmarked £30 million to fund this initiative, and why Wendy Alexander announced yesterday an additional £6 million over the next two years. I welcome the broad support from the SNP for that measure.

We are focusing resources on the problems of this most socially excluded group. We are ensuring that all those who are involved with the homeless target their resources in a co-ordinated way and use them to best effect.

Rough sleeping is at one end of the spectrum of homelessness. We have set up the homelessness task force to take a comprehensive look at the problem. The task force represents a wide range of experience of tackling the causes and the effects of homelessness. It is important that we not only understand the problems and identify practical measures to address them, but listen to homeless people, as, frankly, they are the real experts. The task force will consider the causes of homelessness, examine current practice and make recommendations for action. We made it abundantly clear that setting up a homelessness task force is not an excuse for inaction.

The Government is determined not only to tackle the problem of homelessness, but to do so in a way that is practical, sustainable and, above all, deliverable. It is essential to have input if we are to identify solutions that work and will continue to work.

As a number of speakers have said, it will be important to take local authorities with us in all that we do, because local authorities are best placed to address the problem at a community level. A number of local authorities are putting in place strategies to achieve local co-ordination of social work services, housing, and education policy, as well as effective liaison with health services and

close collaboration with the voluntary sector.

In our broader homelessness strategies, we are drawing on the lessons that have been learned from rough sleeping initiatives.

It has been made abundantly clear that we are considering legislative change. Much of the legislation that we have is 20 years old. A number of organisations have already made proposals to the task force for changes.

I reiterate my welcome for the SNP's broad support for the Executive on this issue, but I believe that, in its amendment, it has got a number of things wrong. The Government is committed to publishing a draft bill and is committed to bringing forward housing legislation. I say to Fiona Hyslop that it would be foolish to rush to publish a draft bill by the end of the year, as the substance of such a bill is too important to get wrong through insufficient preparation. Let us make sure that we get this right. Homelessness cannot simply be solved by passing legislation. We can ensure that the legislative framework gives homelessness the priority and urgency that it merits, but, please, let us not do so in a piecemeal way; let us tackle this problem comprehensively.

In its response to the green paper, Shelter said that it wanted

"an initial six month period identifying and acting on urgent issues, and then a longer phase of up to two years setting out a rolling programme of legislation".

The work of the homelessness task force and the announcement by Wendy Alexander will do just that.

I have been told to wind up, so I will use my time effectively. I agree with the Conservatives that the statistics are damning, but those statistics were the result of Conservative policy, as they relate to the period in which the Conservative party was in office. Too much of Scotland had the wrong houses, of the wrong quality and in the wrong places. There were high levels of unemployment and high levels of family breakdown. I am confident that our actions will reduce the incidence of homelessness. However, we are not complacent.

In conclusion, our commitment to the prevention of homelessness is absolute. We will assist the member's bill to help people facing house repossession. We have provided additional funding to tackle the root causes of homelessness. Much remains to be done, but there is no doubt that our pledge that no one will need to sleep rough in Scotland by the end of the parliamentary session is a challenging one. We mean to deliver: for the vendors of *The Big Issue*, whom I have met, for the Edinburgh Cyrenians and for all the homeless people of Scotland.

## Decision Time

17:02

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-151.2, in the name of Sarah Boyack, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Ms Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)

Oldfather, Ms Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 67, Against 42, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that motion S1M-151, in the name of Murray Tosh, as amended, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

**Members: No.**

**The Presiding Officer:** As there is dissent, there will be a division.

#### FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Ms Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Ms Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### AGAINST

Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 68, Against 16, Abstentions 25.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

That the Parliament welcomes the increased profile that has been given to transport issues and the Scottish Executive's commitment to continue reducing vehicle emission levels; recognises the importance of Scotland's transport links by road, rail, sea and air to our markets in the rest of the UK, the European Union and beyond; commends the efforts the Scottish Executive is making to tackle the consequences of eighteen years of Conservative transport policies and reverse the resulting legacy of under investment, rising congestion and environmental degradation, and calls upon the Scottish Executive to continue to work to deliver a sustainable, effective and integrated transport system through in particular the

Programme of Government commitments on investing in public transport, promoting a national transport timetable and bringing forward a Transport Bill in early 2000 whilst reflecting the diverse transport needs of all Scotland's people, in particular those living in rural areas, and by so doing to take the decisions required to deliver, working with others, an integrated transport system fit for the 21st century.

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that amendment S1M-158.1, in the name of Henry McLeish, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The fourth question is, that motion S1M-158, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

That the Parliament notes that any financial settlement for workers at the Continental Tyre Company is a matter for negotiation between their Trade Union representatives and the company; notes that the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning has urged the company to reach a fair and equitable settlement; notes that negotiations are in progress; hopes that they will reach a quick and positive outcome which takes account of all the relevant circumstances; and notes that the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning will bring this motion to the attention of the Company when he meets them on Friday 17 September.

**The Presiding Officer:** The fifth question is, that amendment S1M-154.2, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)

Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

#### AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Ms Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Ms Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)

Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result is: For 44, Against 65, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The sixth question is, that motion S1M-154, in the name of Ms Wendy Alexander, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Executive is fully committed to tackling the scourge of homelessness in Scotland by virtue of its pledge in the Programme for Government that it will ensure that no-one has to sleep rough by 2003; by providing new accommodation and better support services, and by the establishment of a Task Force to (a) review the causes and nature of homelessness in Scotland, (b) examine current practice in dealing with cases of homelessness, and (c) make recommendations on how homelessness in Scotland can be best prevented and, where it does occur, tackled effectively.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time, so we will move to members' business.

**Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** On a point of order. I have notified Mary Mulligan, the Convener of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, of my intention to raise this point of order.

This afternoon, I was given notice of a press statement issued by Mary Mulligan on behalf of the committee, which purported to clarify a committee decision in light of the convener's interpretation of certain comments made by me to the press. Prior to the statement being released, no attempt was made to check that the convener's interpretation matched my interpretation or that of other members of the committee. Is it in order for a committee convener to issue statements of that nature on behalf of the committee without—

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. That may be a matter for argument within the committee; it is certainly not a point of order for the Presiding Officer.

## Salmon Farming

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** We now move to members' business and motion S1M-98, in the name of Mr Tavish Scott, on the crisis in salmon farming. The debate will last 30 minutes and will be concluded without any question being put.

If they are not staying for the debate, I ask members to be courteous and to leave quietly and quickly in fairness to the member whose motion is being debated.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament recognises the financial pressures the Salmon Farming industry in Shetland is facing, and notes that the industry creates employment for 900 people in this peripheral area of Scotland and contributes £60 million per annum to the Shetland economy.

17:08

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** One of the joys of living in Shetland is that one cannot rush for a train at this time of night. I am stuck here in Edinburgh until Friday morning, but that creates time to speak on this subject, which is important for my constituency and, I would argue, for Scotland as a whole. I am grateful to the Parliamentary Bureau for allocating time in the busy parliamentary day for this debate and I would like to bring a number of issues to do with the salmon farming industry to the attention of the Parliament.

I will give the example of the island of Skerries, which is 10 miles off the east coast of Shetland and is home to some 80 people. The island has white fish trawlers, inshore fishing boats, a fish farm processing factory, and—of course—a salmon farm. The salmon farm is not owned by a multinational, nor is it owned from outwith the island—it is owned and managed from within the island of Skerries. It is the community—more than half the jobs on the island rely on it. The community grows, harvests and packs its own fish.

Skerries salmon farm had a suspected case of infectious salmon anaemia—ISA—in May, which could lead to the forced slaughter of the fish and a six-month fallow period on the farm, during which there can be no restocking. The regime that now dictates the future of the farm puts the community in jeopardy. Along with the rest of the industry in Shetland, the Skerries salmon farm needs solutions, urgent action and a Government that cares about peripheral communities.

Skerries epitomises all that is best about a go-ahead determined community that is living, literally, on the edge of the world. Failing the people there, and many others like them, is not an option. Skerries is a microcosm of Shetland.

Aquaculture has kept communities alive: it means new houses, rural schools growing and not closing, active public hall committees, and active communities throughout Shetland.

Turnover in the industry in the islands has grown from some £220,000 in 1984 to some £57 million last year. The industry produces 35,000 tonnes of salmon. A total of 46 farms employ more than 400 people directly and 900 in total, representing 8 per cent of the working population in Shetland. That is how important salmon farming is to the community I live in.

Those of us who are aware of ISA know that it is a naturally occurring viral disease that cannot affect humans. It is simply the fish equivalent of the common cold. The advice of the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food is that the disease poses no threat to humans.

The disease was first formally recorded in Norway in 1984. Incidents were then reported in Canada. Today, we must discuss how the Executive's policy of ISA eradication can be adapted to give the industry some hope for a sustainable future. Last Monday, in a statement released to the salmon industry, Mr Home Robertson said:

"There is no room for complacency, but I believe some adjustments to the current policy would be appropriate. This would lessen the burden the disease is imposing on the industry and discussions to that end are underway with the EC".

I welcome that statement and I hope that the minister can add to it by announcing what adjustments will be made.

The minister's view that the industry must act is acknowledged in Shetland. Many positive measures have already been—or are in the process of being—introduced. In Shetland, salmon farmers have been proactive in improving procedures, in ever tightening their hygiene standards and in working towards a sustainable future. The industry is setting up a series of blood water treatment plants, which amounts to £600,000-worth of future investment from a variety of financial sources and which includes input from the Shetland salmon industry.

The industry is also working towards a fundamental reform of the works licence policy, which is happening with the co-operation of environmental organisations, the local authority and the industry, and a code of best practice that will cover all aspects of salmon farming, including husbandry, stocking and hygiene.

Shetland has its own independent quality control mechanisms and individual farms are completing accreditation and proceeding through to the Scottish food quality certification status which, as Mr Home Robertson and Mr Finnie know, covers

not just salmon but all of Scotland's food output.

Although the industry is making progress, it needs the support of the Government. I welcome the minister's announcement on 6 September of £3 million a year in a reinvestment package through Highlands and Islands Enterprise. That is a step forward, as is dropping the matching funding requirement in light of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report. However, the industry needs to have details worked out quickly and I am hoping for such a commitment from the minister today.

It took from February to September to get the reinvestment package right. The relaxation sought by the industry must happen. I hope that the minister will accept the urgency of the situation and that he will pass that urgency on to his officials to get them out to farms to work with practical people in order to get the situation right quickly. I hope that, for example, he can send his officials to Shetland to work with the Shetland salmon industry towards practical solutions, because people there want to work through the problems quickly so that the industry knows where it is going.

Mr Home Robertson's statement rejects the industry's call for a Government-funded insurance scheme. The minister knows that commercial insurers will consider insuring against ISA only if the European Union's regime moves towards a set of control measures as used in Norway, which includes a cage-by-cage slaughter regime.

The time scale by which fish must be removed is also hugely important. I ask that the minister, after his statement last week, update the industry on those changes with considerable urgency so that commercial insurance—the big step forward—can be included in the equation as soon as possible.

Such changes will mean adaptation or interpretation of the EU rules. In his closing remarks, will the minister describe what stage discussions on the matter are at and what progress the department is making in Brussels? Will he also set out the time scale within the EU for approving a vaccine as part of the eradication plan?

The costs of ISA to Shetland salmon farming are huge. Losses between September 1998 and June 1999 have been calculated at £1.9 million. Forecast losses due to the deferral of smolts—baby salmon—that have been put in cages as part of the eradication regime are estimated at £5 million, which amounts to 20,000 tonnes of farmed salmon and 900 jobs. What happens to those jobs if production is cut in half?

In the past six to eight months, some 36 jobs have gone. I want that process to stop. I want the industry, which is the future of the island in so

many ways, to stop haemorrhaging.

The final issue I ask the minister to address is the production tax levied by the Crown Estate. Skerries Salmon—a small farm—pays corporation tax; it does not need to pay yet another tax. It pays £19.50 a tonne to the Crown Estate. For what? Members may well ask.

In the past year, £650,000 was removed from an industry in Shetland that was in crisis. I am sure that colleagues from other parts of the Highlands and Islands could give similar figures. I want that £650,000 to be reinvested, for example in research, and not used for a little help here or a little research project there. We need a real long-lasting worthwhile project that benefits not just the current generation of salmon farmers but future generations.

I want to suggest that the Crown Estate tax is put back into the industry using, for example, the highly skilled educational and research facilities at the North Atlantic Fisheries College in Scalloway, which I know the minister visited on his recent trip to Shetland. The industry must have a sustainable and viable future and we must build that future. The Executive should tell the Crown Estate, which has for so long taken money out of the industry, that its time is up and that it is time to put the money back into building the future.

Building a new future must be the Parliament's commitment in support of a hugely important Shetland and Scottish industry. I ask the minister to consider some of those points in his reply.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** I ask members to keep their remarks to three minutes to accommodate as many members as possible.

17:16

**Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** I will be brief as I appreciate that many local members want to make a speech. I congratulate Tavish on his motion and on bringing the subject before Parliament.

The motion reminds us of the important contribution that salmon farming makes to the Scottish economy. The industry sustains more than 6,000 jobs in fragile communities around the country and in places such as Shetland in particular. Given that the income from the industry has materialised during the past 15 years or so, the industry reminds us how a relatively new industry can contribute to the Scottish economy. Pressures such as infectious salmon anaemia, which affect the industry, are causing a decline in profit margins. Salmon farming needs to be much higher up the Government's list of priorities.

Many other crises similar to those being

experienced in salmon farming affect our rural communities. I feel that we need much faster Government responses to them. I would like to know whether there are any plans in the Scottish Executive rural affairs department to create fast response units. I want to get people and officials into rural communities to speak to the people concerned and to come up with solutions as soon as a crisis arises.

The seven-month delay—from the announcement of the original £9 million package, with strings attached, to the most recent announcement, with the strings removed—is unacceptable. Officials and industry representatives do not want to spend their energies lobbying the Government for assistance. They have other things to do with their time, such as trying to make a living and addressing the issues that concern them.

We need a long-term and comprehensive strategy from the Government in connection with salmon farming and all fisheries—aquaculture, freshwater fisheries, inshore fisheries and deep-sea fishing—so that research needs and other matters can be taken into account. I look forward to the minister's response to my comments and those of my colleagues.

17:19

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** I thank Tavish for bringing this motion before the chamber. I think that it is extremely helpful. The issue I want to focus on is fairly technical and, indeed, slightly obscure. Having spoken to Tavish before the debate, I appreciate that it may not be a particularly visible part of the problem in Scotland, but it affects other areas of salmon farming.

My point concerns the anomaly that arises when a salmon farmer is required by law to slaughter his salmon stock. That has immediate effects on jobs and the financial sustainability of that salmon farm. There is also a more insidious and corrosive consequence. The loss of the stock in those circumstances would appear to fall between two stools. It is not an insurable risk. If the salmon has died not as a direct consequence of ISA, but because of the mandatory need to slaughter following the Government directive, that is not an insurable risk, nor is it a case for statutory compensation by Government.

In no way am I seeking to criticise or blame—I realise that this is an obscure and difficult situation—but the practical effect is that, literally overnight, millions of pounds can be wiped off the balance sheets of the industry and its participants. That can have a devastating effect on the viability and sustainability of the industry's operating

capacity. Many farmers will be operating with loan funds and they may be pledged by way of security. It will be an alarming consequence to find suddenly that a capital asset in the balance sheet has been eradicated overnight.

I have benefited from the submission to me of a legal opinion, produced by one of the major salmon farmers in Scotland. I would be very happy to pass that on to the minister.

**The Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr John Home Robertson):** I think that we have seen it.

**Miss Goldie:** I suspected that that would be the case. From the point of view of this chamber, what is important is that article 1 of the first protocol to the European convention on human rights states:

“Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions. No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest and subject to the conditions provided for by law and by the general principles of international law.”

If the United Kingdom compels a fish farmer to destroy his fish stocks, that would appear to amount to a prima facie interference with the farmer's peaceful enjoyment of his possessions.

I appreciate that the minister may not be able to give a simple—or indeed any—answer on this point, but I am compelled to raise it and I thank Tavish again for letting me take part in the debate. I am compelled to raise the point because it strikes at the very heart of the commercial sustainability of a major part of our industry in Highland and rural communities. I shall be grateful if the minister responds in any way that he can to that concern.

17:22

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I thank Tavish for raising this matter. The crux of the problem is that we are tied up in quite inappropriate European regulations, which treat the fish farming industry as if it were land-based farming.

One of the directors of Aquascot said to me yesterday, “If you have a field full of cows, you don't have to worry about wild cows poking their heads through the fence and passing a disease to your stock, but if you're fish farming, it's all too easy for wild fish to pass on disease to farmed fish.” Fish farmers believe that ISA is endemic in the wild fish population.

Under present regulations, ISA need only be suspected in one fish, in one cage, for the farm to be quarantined and the stock ruled unable to be moved. A farm that, in the end, does not have the disease can suffer considerable financial loss through having its operations halted. That happened to Wester Ross Salmon Ltd. Farms that

contract ISA have to slaughter their stock, even if only a few fish are affected. Supermarkets will not buy perfectly healthy fish from that zone, because of the perception that the fish are diseased. Ironically, the supermarkets will then buy their fish from Norway, where the regulations are less strict and the fish may come from areas in which the disease has been controlled rather than eradicated.

Another problem, which has already been mentioned, is the ban on movement of young fish within zones. If young fish cannot be moved, they outgrow their cages, become stressed and are more susceptible to disease.

The stock of fish is the farmer's collateral with the bank. With ISA so prevalent and impossibly expensive to insure against, the banks will stop lending money against a farm full of fish that may have to be slaughtered before they are sold. Fish farmers believe that ISA can never be eradicated.

If the industry is to survive and develop by farming other species of fish such as cod and turbot that are also susceptible to diseases—which do not affect human beings but are borne by wild fish—we need a regulatory system that allows control of the disease rather than one that insists on total eradication. The Executive has sympathy with this point of view and I ask it to pursue with all speed the possibility of control regulation.

Some farms were brought to the verge of bankruptcy because, although disease free, they were closed down on mere suspicion. I hope that any compensation or help package will be applied to such farms and not be strictly confined to those that suffered the disease.

17:24

**George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD):** I, too, welcome this debate, initiated by my colleague Tavish Scott. The salmon farming industry is important to Argyll and Bute, where it employs around 1,000 people directly and indirectly. Many businesses have been badly hit by the ISA outbreak. It affects not only direct employment, but many of the small businesses in our remote rural areas that rely on a successful salmon farming industry. MacDonald's filling station at Salen on Mull, for example, has experienced a 50 per cent drop in turnover since the outbreaks of ISA were discovered on Mull some eight or nine months ago.

I would like the minister to take action on two points. The first is the policy of eradication. Annabel Goldie hit the nail on the head on that issue. We have already welcomed the minister's statement to the industry in which he said that he wanted a much more flexible approach to the eradication policy, but we need to know what the

details of that are. I would emphasise that the industry needs to know quickly.

Underlying the need for quick action is the fact that the salmon farming industry in Argyll and Bute believes that the Executive should abandon the policy of eradication, which it considers to be fundamentally flawed. The industry believes that we should pursue a policy similar to that in Norway and Canada where ISA is managed and controlled.

The current policy of eradication means that capital assets vanish overnight when ISA is discovered in stock. That means that many businesses are wiped out, because their capital reserves suddenly drain away. There is, of course, no compensation. I believe that the policy is flawed and all the producers to whom I have spoken in my area believe that it needs to be reconsidered.

The second point that I want the minister to address is the issue of insurance, which a number of people have raised. The eradication policy means that producers cannot insure against the crisis. That needs to be considered also.

I ask the minister to give an undertaking that the Executive will seek to have the eradication policy changed in Europe. I also ask him to ensure that smolt and brood stock producers will qualify for the £9 million that is available under the new Highlands and Islands Enterprise scheme. Finally, I want to reinforce Tavish Scott's point on the production tax levied by the Crown Estate commissioners, which—as Tavish rightly pointed out—is equivalent to a poll tax on the salmon industry, which sees the tax as extremely unfair.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call on Jamie McGrigor to make a brief contribution.

17:28

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I do not know how, but I will try to condense my remarks.

I am pleased to support Tavish Scott's motion and congratulate him on raising this issue.

Shetland is, of course, part of the Highlands and Islands, although with its admirable independence, it has the Shetland Salmon Farmers Association. Shetland has a reputation for producing the best salmon in Scotland—the fish certainly look and taste better than most.

I want, however, to widen the debate to cover the problems faced by the Scottish Salmon Growers Association, the other main relevant body in the Highlands and Islands, whose members face the same problems as those faced in Shetland.

ISA was classified as exotic by the European Union, which unfortunately means that stock has to be destroyed. Unlike in Norway and Canada, where ISA is simply controlled, we try to eliminate it. That has led to the slaughter of many thousands of perfectly healthy salmon of different sizes. In any other business, especially agriculture, which is similar to aquaculture, compensation would be paid for slaughtered stock, if the slaughter was deemed to be in the public interest.

The Executive's response was to say that £9 million would be made available to the industry, provided that the industry could match that sum pound for pound. That was unacceptable to the salmon farmers, who were not only reeling from the effects of ISA, but were having to deal with the collapse in salmon prices. The farmers posed the question—which I asked in the chamber—whether the Executive would act as a guarantor for the insurance of the salmon farmers' stock. The Executive's answer was non-committal, although it was obvious that the matter was being considered.

Such a solution seemed good—a Scottish solution to a Scottish problem—and was what the industry wanted. In any other fish farming country, insurance can easily be obtained with the payment of a sum equal to the value of a small percentage of the farmer's stock. However, in Scotland, because ISA-infected stock is completely destroyed, there is no collateral on which to obtain such insurance.

The Executive has liaised with Westminster and produced a £9 million package for Scottish salmon growers. The earlier demand for a pound-for-pound match has been removed, and I will not call the sum of £3 million insulting, as any help for the industry is welcome. However, why was it necessary to go to Westminster? If the Scottish Parliament is meant to act closely with the Scottish people and with Scottish industry, why could it not—and, better still, why cannot it now—change its mind and accept a uniquely Scottish solution to a uniquely Scottish problem? Under these difficult circumstances, I ask the Executive to act as a guarantor for the insurance of Scotland's salmon farming industry.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Hamilton, you will have until 17:32 and 30 seconds.

17:30

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I will do my very best for you, Mr Reid.

I congratulate Tavish on securing this debate, and I echo most—virtually all—of the comments that have been made and the questions that have been raised.

We should bear in mind the strength of the

pound, as, although this Parliament has no control over that, it is none the less a major contributing factor to the crisis that the industry is facing. When we discuss the problems in the industry, we must pay due attention to that most important issue.

I would appreciate specific answers from the minister on the question of the £3 million per annum that is now under the auspices of Highlands and Islands Enterprise. First, what are the criteria for deciding which businesses will be successful in accessing that money? The industry would appreciate clarification on that point. Secondly, will the minister give an undertaking that the decision-making process will be as transparent as the industry—and, indeed, this Parliament—would wish it to be?

Finally, the Government's information pack says:

"The industry's response was to welcome the £9 million HIE proposal".

Well, yea and nay—yes, the industry did welcome it, but, on the other hand, I can quote back. The Scottish Salmon Growers Association was "deeply disappointed" with the measures that were announced, for the very reasons that Mr Scott, Mr Lyon and others gave. I ask the minister to address the industry's concerns.

Mr Michael Foxley, the chairman of Highland Council's land and environment select committee, said:

"I don't think it is acceptable the £9 million fund will be administered solely by HIE."

Therefore, I do not think that the industry universally welcomed the proposal.

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)** *rose*—

**Mr Hamilton:** I am not sure that I have time, but I will give way if I am allowed to.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Hamilton, you have five seconds.

**Mr Hamilton:** In that case, I am afraid that I will not give way.

I would welcome the minister's comments on the specific question of reassuring the industry on the £3 million per annum given to Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call on Mr John Home Robertson to wind up the debate.

17:32

**The Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr John Home Robertson):** I am grateful to the member for Shetland and to the other six members who have taken part in the debate. I do not have long to reply, but I will do my best. If I

miss any specific points, I will ask the officials to write to the members concerned.

It is abundantly clear from the debate that the industry is important, particularly in many fragile, remote areas of the country such as the Shetland islands; Mr Scott referred to the Skerries as an extreme example. The industry is tremendously important and has achieved much. It could achieve a lot more, and that is the way in which we would all wish to look at it.

There is a need for the highest possible standards of husbandry and I know that most people in the industry acknowledge and strive to achieve that. It is important that the industry has proper regard for the environment, for wild fish and for other people who use our seas.

Much has been said about the industry's needs and the case for financial support. It would be unfair, and a mistake, not to make some reference to the fact that the industry has received quite a lot of public funding over the years, and rightly so. It has received £5 million over five years—structural funds from the financial instrument for fisheries guidance—and £14 million over nine years from Highlands and Islands Enterprise and its predecessor. Very properly, it has had access to local funds, particularly in the Shetland islands, and I could add centrally funded research and development moneys—and the rest of it—to that list. Over the piece, the industry has had the benefit of quite a lot of public funding. I put that on the record as I think that it is important to do so.

The debate has focused on the crisis arising from the outbreak of infectious salmon anaemia last year. That has given rise to a series of major problems for the industry and to substantial costs. That is why we responded—after protracted discussions with the industry—with last week's announcement of £9 million-worth of support through Highlands and Islands Enterprise for fish farming companies affected by ISA. That is a substantial sum of public money and it will be provided without the preconditions that were attached to the offer that was made in February. I point out for Mr McGrigor's benefit that the new offer had nothing to do with Whitehall or with the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; it is a Scottish Executive package, and properly so.

I recognise the frustration at the time that it has taken to reach a decision, but there were good reasons. Look at the background. At the outset, industry claimed compensation for fish losses attributable to ISA. Successive Governments—and this Executive—have rejected the principle of compensation for losses arising from fish diseases. It is important to emphasise that the controls on ISA as a category 1 disease were put in place by the European Union in the interests of the industry. As someone said earlier, that has

nothing to do with public health, but is to safeguard the interests of the industry. I understand that some people in the industry take a different view, and that that point will be tested in the courts in due course—quite possibly in the European Court. We must await a judgment. I think that is the point that Miss Goldie was making.

The previous Administration recognised the industry's plight and earlier in the year offered £9 million towards a fund if the industry would match it. In the event, the industry said that it was unable to match it. Industry then proposed that the Government should act as insurers for any ISA-related losses. We considered that proposal carefully too, but we concluded that the Government is not an insurance company and that it would not be right for us to underwrite unquantifiable risks at the taxpayer's expense.

**Mr McGrigor:** Will you take an intervention?

**Mr Home Robertson:** I am sorry. I have not got time. There have been a lot of speeches and I have a lot to say.

The Executive recognises the value and importance of the industry to the rural economy and that is why we announced last week that £9 million would be made available to Highlands and Islands Enterprise over the next three years. There will be no need for the industry to raise matching funds through a national levy, as was originally envisaged.

The source of the disease is as yet unknown—there is much conjecture about it—and we may never discover where it came from. However, I would emphasise again the importance of good husbandry to minimise the risk of further outbreaks. I accept that the eradication measures have hit the industry hard.

**Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** Will you take an intervention?

**Mr Home Robertson:** I am sorry, I do not have time. I apologise. The eradication measures that are required—compulsory slaughter, movement controls and a fallowing period—have hit the industry hard. Given the financial costs of ISA and the potential damage to the industry's public image, eradication is in the best interests of the industry and will remain our ultimate goal. I accept that in some respects—the fallowing of sites, for example—we should be able to exercise greater discretion in future and, in so doing, bring some relief to the industry.

I also recognise that there may be a case for greater flexibility within the statutory rules, such as a more managed approach to the slaughter of infected stocks. Mr Scott made the case for that more flexible approach, as did George Lyon and my colleague Maureen Macmillan. The Executive

has now submitted proposals to Brussels to secure additional flexibility if we reach a position where the present strategy appears to be unsustainable. I hope that the industry will work with us in consideration of that contingency, if it arises. It may take until the end of the year before we get a conclusive reply from the European Union, but we have set things in motion.

In conclusion, Presiding Officer, £9 million of public money has been found by the Executive despite many other competing priorities. That demonstrates the Government's desire to support the salmon farming industry, because it is so important to the remote areas of Scotland. Government energies must now be urgently directed into working out the details of the Highlands and Islands Enterprise scheme and securing appropriate state aid clearance from Brussels. Applications will be invited as soon as possible, and we expect Highlands and Islands Enterprise to be in a position to publish their plans within the next couple of months. We are doing as much as we can, as fast as we can.

I am grateful to Mr Scott and to other colleagues for raising this important issue and I hope that I have been of some assistance.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes this debate on the crisis in salmon farming.

*Meeting closed at 17:40.*

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