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Meeting of the Parliament

Coinneamh na Pàrlamaid

Tuesday 19 May 2026

Session 7



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 19 May 2026

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

First Minister

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson):

Good afternoon, everyone. The first item of business is the selection of the Parliament's nominee as First Minister. A note explaining the procedure to be followed has been made available to all members.

I have received six valid nominations for selection of the Parliament's nominee for First Minister. I will announce the nominees in alphabetical order: Alex Cole-Hamilton, Russell Findlay, Gillian Mackay, Malcolm Offord, Anas Sarwar and John Swinney.

I will ask each nominee to speak in support of their candidacy for up to five minutes. After the nominees have spoken, members will be asked to cast their vote for their preferred candidate. A separate vote will be called for each candidate, and members can vote only once. When all voting has been completed, any member who has not yet voted will be invited to cast a vote to abstain. There will be a short suspension while the result is verified. I will then announce the results of voting.

A candidate will be elected if an overall majority is obtained. If no majority is obtained, the candidate or candidates with the smallest number of votes will be eliminated. I ask members to note that, if we have a vote between only two candidates, all that is required for one of the candidates to be elected is a simple majority. Members might wish to record an abstention, and no account of those votes will be taken in establishing whether a simple majority has been achieved. We will then proceed to a further round of voting.

I call Alex Cole-Hamilton, who has up to five minutes.

14:01

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh North Western) (LD): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I welcome you to your new role.

I rise to speak to my candidacy for First Minister of Scotland in an atmosphere of hope rather than expectation. Elections are a time of choosing—this election was no different from the previous one in

that regard—and the Scottish election that we have just been through was, in itself, a time of choosing. It was an inflection point at which all of us were offered our instructions by the people who send us to this place.

The election also represented the final spoke in the wheel of revival for my party. I am heartily glad of that, coming as it did after the best general election result for our party in 100 years and big council gains across the country. The Scottish election represented a massive leap forward for the Scottish Liberal Democrats, in terms of both vote share and the number of seats returned. When looking at the constituency map of Scotland, we see that we are the second party of Scotland: we have won in places where we have never won before, and we have taken a massive leap forward, with the best result for my party in nearly 20 years.

The measure of that achievement was summed up well by *The Times* when it wrote:

"In the final analysis it was the Lib Dems who perhaps did more than any other party to thwart the nationalist march to 65 seats." [Interruption.]

Do not take it from me. That is the story of the election.

As much as I respect John Swinney, he has known only regression during his time as party leader of the Scottish National Party. He has gone only backwards in his efforts and has experienced electoral decline. As the old Parliament rose and we were gavelled out of session, he could not have been clearer: he stated for the whole country to hear that, if he was to achieve the mandate necessary to call for a second independence referendum, he needed the public at large to award his party an overall majority. He fell well short of that. In large part, that was because Liberal Democrat gains in the villages and towns of this country rendered him unable to deliver what he asked the people to give him.

As such, I ask that we, as a Parliament, now lay those divisive issues aside, put talk of the constitution in the deep freeze and, instead, focus on the instructions that the people who sent us to this place have been manifestly clear that they want us to focus on. That includes the crisis in our health service, which is not just a crisis in our hospitals but is born of the fact that there is such a paucity of social care in our communities that, on any given night, 2,000 of our fellow Scots are stuck in hospital, including Margaret MacGill, whose case I raised many times in the previous parliamentary session. Such people are well enough to go home but are unable to do so without adequate care to receive them. They are stuck in that awful limbo that leads to cancelled operations or to corridor care in our accident and emergency

departments because people cannot be discharged into the wider hospital.

There is the fact that we have all had constituents come to see us, sometimes in great distress, because their young person or they themselves have been unable to get access to the diagnostics that they need, particularly to diagnose things around child and adolescent mental health or neurodiversity—in parts of Edinburgh, some have been told that they will have to wait seven years for that. People come to see us because they are receiving care in crumbling hospitals that are no longer fit for purpose and are in desperate need of not just refurbishment but renewal in their entirety.

We want to focus on lifting up Scottish education. We heard just this week the awful results of an Educational Institute of Scotland survey that shows that far too many of our teachers at primary and secondary level are assaulted on a daily basis in their place of work. We want to support them by taking mobile phones out of classrooms, putting in 2,000 pupil support assistants and making sure that newly qualified teachers have a stable, permanent job to go to.

We want to drive down the cost of living by instructing an immediate programme of emergency home insulation to make sure that the coldest homes in Scotland—the households that are most at risk of fuel poverty—are ready for the increase in the fuel price cap that we heard about today, and that those who are already at risk of fuel poverty, because they do not have a price cap to protect them from an increase in costs for heating oil, are protected with as much insulation as we can provide.

We need to get Scotland moving again. The early days of the election campaign were bedevilled by a ferry crisis that brought our island and coastal communities to their knees at a time when they needed our support.

Elections are about a choice. We offer a vision of hope and change with fairness at its heart. I humbly submit my candidacy for First Minister.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Mr Cole-Hamilton. That was four minutes and 57 seconds—I am impressed with your timing. I call Russell Findlay to speak for five minutes.

14:06

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): I can beat that.

Congratulations on your election, Presiding Officer. I suspect that today's proceedings will not be quite as exciting as last week's, because, of course, this is largely a foregone conclusion.

However, I have put my name forward because it gives me the opportunity to put forward my vision for a better Scotland and for a Scottish Parliament that works on behalf of the people who put us here.

John Swinney spent the entire election saying that he was going to win—and with a majority. He said that winning a majority would be the trigger for another independence referendum. His relentless obsession with breaking up the United Kingdom is not what people want to hear. We know what matters most to the people of Scotland: the ever-rising cost of living, Scotland's stagnant economy, the NHS being in a near-permanent state of crisis and the impact of immigration on strained public services. What they do not want is a distracting and painful return to the arguments of the past.

Thankfully, John Swinney did not get the majority that he said was in the bag, and my party played its part in stopping him. The blue wall stayed blue as we won a hat trick of seats across the south of Scotland. However, I was bitterly disappointed to lose so many valuable and respected colleagues in my party and beyond. This is a very different Parliament from the one that came before.

When John Swinney is inevitably elected as First Minister today, he will have some big questions to answer. He has said that he will work with Sinn Féin to break up the UK and that victims of IRA terrorism should “move on”—I wonder whether he understands the hurt that those comments have caused. Will he continue to put constitutional paralysis above good governance? When Scots tell him that a referendum is not a priority, as they did in another poll published today, will he listen? Even without a majority, I fear that he will not listen, because independence will remain the only issue that really matters to him and his party.

This is what a sensible and responsible First Minister should focus on: growing the economy; backing business and not attacking it; cutting taxes for those who work hard; and doing the right thing by fixing our national health service, schools and other public services.

On the economy, let us start with Scotland's world-leading oil and gas sector. The SNP opposes new drilling. John Swinney's party agrees with Labour that oil and gas should remain under the North Sea. Thousands of jobs are being lost. That position is absurd, especially in today's volatile world. Our country will need oil and gas for decades, not just for energy but for manufacturing, so I ask John Swinney: does it really make sense for Norway to extract oil and gas from the same basin that his party wants to leave untapped? I think that he knows the answer to that.

I make the promise today that the Scottish Conservatives will continue to stand up for the oil and gas sector. We would get Britain drilling again. People in the north-east know that we are the strongest challengers to the SNP—we came within just over 1,000 votes of beating Stephen Flynn. If pro-UK voters unite behind the Scottish Conservatives in Aberdeen South in a few weeks' time, we can beat the SNP again.

We all have a duty to act in the best interests of the people of Scotland. This Parliament has an opportunity to transform Scotland over the next five years. A more dynamic and prosperous Scotland should be our shared goal—we should be a country of opportunity, with more well-paid jobs, and of lower taxes and less red tape, where hard work and aspiration are rewarded. Let us harness our proud spirit of innovation to get Scotland working again.

14:11

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Green): I congratulate you on your appointment, Presiding Officer.

First, I acknowledge that, unless something dramatic happens, I should get 15 votes, so I doubt that I will become First Minister this afternoon. Despite that, there is something to be hopeful about. The electorate has returned not only the biggest-ever independence-supporting majority but the biggest-ever majority for parties that are socially progressive. Those who lost in numbers at the election were the ones chasing votes to the right, and that must inform what we do in this parliamentary session.

We acknowledge that the SNP won the election and should have the right to form a Government, and we will work with it on issues to make Scotland a fairer, greener and independent country. However, we will also hold that Government to account to ensure that ambition matches delivery. We want a debate on the future of Scotland as an independent nation, and I hope that the First Minister will keep his promise to bring that forward as soon as possible.

We have seen how badly Westminster has let Scotland down, making things much more difficult not just for the Parliament but for the people of Scotland. We were promised big things in the wake of 2014, but what followed was Brexit, a decade of Westminster failure, a merry-go-round of Prime Ministers and an ongoing climate breakdown. People's lives have got materially worse, and Scotland must have our chance to choose differently.

For the Scottish Greens, independence is not an end goal in itself; it is a tool that we can use to make Scotland better, where democracy and

decision making are closer to people. That is why, alongside that push for a referendum, we must use all the powers that we already have to make Scotland a better place to live in right now.

We all heard during the election campaign about the immediate and real impact that the cost of living crisis is having on people's lives. There are a host of solutions that not only put money back into people's pockets but help to tackle the climate emergency at the same time. Providing everyone with free bus travel would put money back into people's pockets while moving more people on to public transport. We have seen the success of free bus travel for under-22s. Making sure that people, particularly those commuting, could leave the car at home would help to tackle transport emissions, which we have historically struggled to make a dent in. Other countries have taken that step in recent months, and we should absolutely be doing the same.

A large portion of families' income is taken up by childcare costs. Unfortunately, we no longer live in a time where families can survive on one income, so good-quality, affordable childcare is a must. That, for us, has to be a universal offering, giving every child the same start and, crucially, making sure that the funding follows the child. Supporting families, particularly women, to be able to work with good-quality, reliable childcare will absolutely help to tackle child poverty.

It is crucial that we look at our tax system and how we tax wealth in particular, in order to make sure that we can afford the measures that will support many people across society. We need to make sure that everyone can have a home to call their own, that they can heat that home, that we have good-quality public services, that nurses and teachers are paid well and that we deliver that fairer society. Tax is how we fund those things, which are for the common good, and those with the most should contribute the most.

It is clear that the hopeful vision that the Scottish Greens put forward at the election resonates with the hundreds of thousands of Scots who voted for us. Above all else, perhaps, what people want to see now are actions that make Scotland a fairer, kinder and more welcoming country. Not only do we have a large pro-independence majority in this chamber, but we have a pro-Europe majority and a pro-immigration majority. This is a Parliament that not only recognises the contribution of all Scots, old and new, but says that Scotland's future is one that looks outwards to our neighbours and friends across seas and borders.

The people of Scotland need this Parliament to work collaboratively in the face of unprecedented crises so as to make people's lives better both here and around the world. The Scottish Greens

are ready to do that. Scotland is ready, so let us make that happen.

14:15

Malcolm Offord (West Scotland) (Reform):

Presiding Officer, welcome to your place and congratulations on your appointment. As you will be well aware, 250 years ago, Kirkcaldy-born Adam Smith published “The Wealth of Nations”, and today Smith is revered around the world as the father of modern capitalism who explained how a country can be prosperous and fair for the benefit of all its people.

Sadly, in 25 years of devolution, Scotland has turned her back on Adam Smith. All that we have seen from the SNP is record highs in tax and spend and grievances stoked up against the rest of the United Kingdom for cynical political gain. Now, with the SNP in partnership with the Greens, we have seen the politics of envy take root—politics that maybe meant well, but which paid no attention to perverse incentives in housing, welfare and regulation, which have instead made housing scarce, driven businesses bust, put workers out of jobs and reduced tax revenues, impacting public services across the board.

With budgets under pressure, we have seen those who work and those who venture their own savings to create businesses and jobs being overburdened with the ever-mounting bill. At first, they were those who could afford to pay a little more, but as the bill has grown, they have been asked to pay more and more, with less and less to show for it in return. Bureaucracy has bloated, the engines of our prosperity are straining, and we find ourselves punishing those who aspire—those who are ambitious for themselves, their families and their communities—simply for trying to enjoy a good, decent life.

That cannot continue. It must not continue. If we wish to build a prosperous Scotland that works for all, we cannot be led by this ideology of impoverishment. We want Scotland to have world-class public services, to hum with the whirring of industry and the buzz of thriving high streets, and to put a good life within the reach of every Scot.

When I went down to London as a young Scot to make something of myself, with just one suitcase, my rugby boots and £2,000 in debt, I went with true treasure. I was a product of the very best of Scottish education that was provided freely by the state. I went with the most valuable of treasures—Scottish values of hard work, endeavour and honesty.

I do not want young Scots to have to go to London to make their fortune, as I and many others did. I want them to have ample opportunities to stay in Scotland and prosper. However, regardless

of how they make their way in the world, I want them to go with the same true treasure—the true wealth that I was given. The kind of state education that Scotland gave me is lamentably rare today. Too often, it has to be bought, whether through people paying for private education or people buying a house in the right state school catchment area. Allowing standards and discipline to slip so drastically, as the SNP has done in pursuit of ideological fads, has undermined the wealth and opportunity of young Scots.

Real life is about incentives. Canny Scots will always work hard if we incentivise them, but not in a broken system of high taxation and welfare dependency that scarcely makes it worth while. Meanwhile, the inherently Scottish values of hard work, endeavour and honesty are being actively discouraged by this rotten system at every turn, with grievance and envy being stoked in their place. If we want a Scotland of endeavour and enterprise and if we want Scots to enjoy prosperity and plenty, we must urgently change course.

Surely, all the proof that we need that the current system is broken lies in the fact that 2 million Scots did not vote in the 2026 election—a staggering 47 per cent of the electorate, in comparison with 16 per cent who were non-voters in the 2014 indyref.

The incumbent parties in the chamber should take a good, hard look at themselves. How can Scotland be led by a First Minister from the SNP whose share of the vote fell by another 10 per cent? We should consider the decline in votes for the separatist parties, combined: from 1.6 million in 2014 to 1.3 million in 2021 and to 1 million this year. How can that ever be considered a mandate for separation?

Furthermore, how could Scotland be led by a First Minister from Scottish Labour, whose steady decline can be traced from 56 MSPs in 1999 to 17 today, and whose vote share has halved from 32 per cent to 16 per cent?

No—Scotland deserves a First Minister who wishes to build opportunity and prosperity for every Scot. The only party in the chamber with that agenda is Reform UK.

14:20

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Presiding Officer, I congratulate you on your election.

I rise to make this speech in the knowledge that we already know the outcome of today’s vote. I congratulate John Swinney and the SNP on their election win on 7 May.

My party fought the election on the belief that Scotland needs change. It was an election and an argument that we did not win. That is disappointing

and I do not pretend otherwise, but it is important to convey what I still believe today. Our politics, our Parliament and our country need to change. We have a collective responsibility to represent and serve the people and, in the current climate, to bring our country together and take on the politics of fear and blame.

Although the election result is settled, the challenges that Scotland faces are not. The need to tackle deep-seated issues in Scottish society remains as urgent today, and the Parliament must rise to that challenge.

We need a Government that will focus relentlessly on the things that matter: growing our economy; supporting our high streets; driving down waiting lists; improving access to primary care; providing dignity in the delivery of social care; making life more affordable; giving every young person the chance to succeed; and supporting our communities to feel safer and stronger.

In doing that, we must also recognise the mood in the country as it is, not as we might wish it to be. During the election campaign, one word came up again and again: “scunnered”. People are frustrated, angry and tired. They are tired of political arguments that seem disconnected from their lives. That should concern every single one of us because, if people lose faith not only in one party or one Government but in the ability of politics itself to improve their lives, that not only undermines our democracy but opens up opportunities for those who seek to divide us.

Half the MSPs in the chamber have been elected to our Parliament for the first time. This is a historic opportunity for them—for all of us—to demonstrate either the best of Scotland or the worst of our politics; to change the culture positively or negatively; to achieve greater co-operation or greater conflict; and to trade in bigger ideas or bigger insults.

I therefore say to members new and old, let us not miss the opportunity to do what is best and right for Scotland. That means confronting the politics of fear and blame, not inflaming it. We may come from different political sides, but that does not mean that we have to dislike or hate each another. We must confront the idea that if someone believes something different, sounds different or looks different, they somehow have to be feared. Of course, we should call out and take action on wrongdoing and, yes, we should have big debates and confront big issues, but we should not generalise, marginalise and demonise, because what might seem like just words to each of us in here are lived consequences for people out there. We must remain a nation that looks at its neighbour with compassion, not suspicion. That is the Scotland that we were when my grandfather

arrived in Lossiemouth in the 1940s, and it is the Scotland that we must be today.

That also means taking responsibility, not always looking for someone else to blame, because the idea that someone else or somewhere else is to blame for our problems—the idea that somehow everything would be fine if it were not for “them over there”—is dangerous, too.

I believe that our country is full of talent, compassion, ambition and decency. I am sure that this Parliament is also full of talent, compassion, ambition and decency.

People out there all want the same basic things. They want our public services to work. They want opportunity to be shared. They want communities to be supported, and they want a Government to match the efforts that they make in their lives every single day. Although I will not win today’s vote, I will continue to argue for the kind of Scotland that I grew up in, and the kind of Scotland that I want my children to grow up in, too: one that is based on all of us, not on us versus them.

Our duty—this goes for every single one of us—is to come to this Parliament to act, to serve and to deliver for the great people of Scotland. Let us get straight to work.

The Presiding Officer: I call John Swinney. You have up to five minutes, Mr Swinney.

14:25

John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP): I begin by congratulating you on your election, Presiding Officer.

As we begin this new session of the Scottish Parliament, I stand before members with a clear mandate from the people of Scotland to seek nomination as the First Minister. The election is over, the people have spoken and they have emphatically supported the Scottish National Party. I offer to form a Government to deliver on behalf of the people we all serve—not cautiously, not hesitantly, but with purpose—on the issues that matter most in the lives of our people. That is exactly what a Government that I lead will do.

The challenges that face our nation are real. Families continue to feel the pressure of the cost of living, and public services continue to face significant demands. Events in Westminster and across the world continue to impact here at home, and many people are feeling the strain in their everyday lives. This Parliament and this Government must meet the moment—not with incremental change, but with a clear sense of direction and an agenda that matches the ambition that people have for this country.

Scotland is a country of enormous strength and opportunity. It is a country with the talent, the resources and the determination not only to react to challenges but to overcome them. The Government that I lead will work to build a Scotland where families are supported through the cost of living crisis and where the pressures that they face are eased, not ignored; a Scotland with a strong modern national health service that is accessible, resilient and there for the people when they need it; a Scotland where businesses grow, good jobs are created and economic opportunity exists in every part of our country; a Scotland with safe communities and secure energy; a Scotland that leads the way in clean renewables, protecting our environment and turning our natural advantages into lasting prosperity; and a Scotland that is fairer, where we reduce poverty, tackle inequality and ensure that prosperity is shared.

The Government that I lead will also press for the future of Scotland to be decided by the people of Scotland. The people have again returned a pro-independence majority to this Parliament—the largest such majority ever elected. They have said with a resounding voice that decisions about Scotland’s future should be taken here, in Scotland. I will ensure that the people have the right to decide on their own future.

That is the agenda that I offer the people of Scotland. It is ambitious, it is practical and it is ready to be delivered in this new Parliament with a new mandate and a Government that is determined to get on with the job.

I recognise that no Government delivers alone, and that is certainly true of a Government that, alone, does not command a majority in the Parliament. This Parliament contains people with strongly held and sometimes very different views, but I am confident that there exists in this Parliament a majority for all the policy proposals that I put forward in the election. The challenge for me, which I will readily accept if I am elected as First Minister, is to work in ways that enable that majority to emerge.

In addition to setting out the policy direction of the Government that I offer to lead, I also set out a willingness to work with others in this Parliament to seek agreement on measures that will improve the lives of people in Scotland. Over my years in this Parliament, I have seen this chamber rise to that challenge. Yes, we can disagree robustly, but we can also still work together to deliver for the people of Scotland. In that respect, I welcome the substance and tone of Mr Sarwar’s comments. That is what Scotland needs of us at this moment: not simply debate, but delivery; not simply difference, but progress. Ultimately, it is by that progress that we will all be judged.

Presiding Officer, I am ready to lead a Government that meets this moment with clarity, energy and purpose; a Government that takes action; a Government that delivers; and a Government that is always on Scotland’s side. With the mandate that we have been given, with a clear plan for the work ahead, and with a determination to deliver for the people of Scotland, I ask for the support of this Parliament to serve as Scotland’s First Minister.

The Presiding Officer: I thank each of our six candidates. They were all very well behaved; none of them was over time. I hope that that will be a lesson to all of you in this chamber as we move forward.

Before we move to the vote, there will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system. I urge all members to have their cards inserted in the consoles to enable them to vote.

14:30

Meeting suspended.

14:35

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that they must vote once only and must use only their yes button in the voting app when voting.

Once the voting for candidates is completed, members who have not voted for a candidate will be given the opportunity to vote to abstain by pressing their yes button. I will announce the result once all votes have been cast and verified.

The first vote is for Alex Cole-Hamilton. Only members who wish to cast their vote for Alex Cole-Hamilton should take part in this vote, by voting yes. No other members should vote. Members who wish to vote for Alex Cole-Hamilton should vote yes now. You have 60 seconds in which to vote.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The voting time has ended. Any member who wished to vote for Alex Cole-Hamilton and believes that they have been unable to cast their vote should advise that they would like to make a point of order.

The next vote is for Russell Findlay. Only members who wish to cast their vote for Russell Findlay should take part in this vote, by voting yes. No other members should vote. Members who wish to vote for Russell Findlay should vote yes now. Again, you have 60 seconds in which to vote.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: Voting has now closed. Any member who believes that they were unable to cast their vote for Russell Findlay and wishes to do so should advise that they wish to make a point of order.

The next vote is for Gillian Mackay. Only members who wish to vote for Gillian Mackay should take part in this vote, by voting yes. No other members should vote. Members who wish to vote for Gillian Mackay should vote yes now. You have 60 seconds in which to vote.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The voting time has ended. Any member who believes that they were unable to cast their vote for Gillian Mackay should advise that they would like to make a point of order.

The next vote is for Malcolm Offord. Only members who wish to vote for Malcolm Offord should take part in this vote, by voting yes. No other members should vote. Members who wish to vote for Malcolm Offord should vote yes now. Members have 60 seconds in which to vote.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The voting time has ended. Any member who believes that they were unable to cast their vote for Malcolm Offord should advise that they would like to make a point of order.

The next vote is for Anas Sarwar. Only members who wish to vote for Anas Sarwar should take part in this vote, by voting yes. No other members should vote. Members who wish to vote for Anas Sarwar should vote yes now. Members have 60 seconds in which to vote.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The voting time has ended. Any member who believes that they were unable to cast their vote for Malcolm Offord should advise that they would like to make a point of order. I am sorry—that was a Freudian slip. I meant to say Anas Sarwar.

The next vote is for John Swinney. Only members who wish to vote for John Swinney should take part in this vote, by voting yes. No other members should vote. Members who wish to vote for John Swinney should vote yes now. Members have 60 seconds in which to vote.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The voting time has ended. Any member who believes that they were unable to cast their vote for John Swinney should advise that they would like to make a point of order.

There were no abstentions. That concludes this round of voting. There will now be a brief suspension while the votes are verified.

14:45

Meeting suspended.

14:48

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: In that round of voting in the selection of the Parliament's nominee for First Minister, the number of votes cast for each candidate was as follows: Alex Cole-Hamilton 10, Russell Findlay 12, Gillian Mackay 15, Malcolm Offord 17, Anas Sarwar 17, John Swinney 57, Abstentions 0.

The division list will be published as soon as possible.

The Presiding Officer: As Mr Cole-Hamilton received the fewest votes, he will be eliminated from the election and a further round of voting will take place with the following candidates: Russell Findlay, Gillian Mackay, Malcolm Offord, Anas Sarwar and John Swinney.

The first vote in this round is for Russell Findlay. Members who wish to cast their vote for Mr Findlay should vote yes now. Again, members have 60 seconds in which to do so.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The voting time has ended. Any member who believes that they were unable to cast their vote for Russell Findlay should advise that they wish to make a point of order.

The second vote is for Gillian Mackay. Members who wish to cast their vote for Gillian Mackay should vote yes now. You have 60 seconds in which to do so.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The voting time has ended. Any member who believes that they have been unable to cast their vote should advise that they would like to make a point of order.

Q Manivannan (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Sorry—I was unable to do so because of technical snafus. I vote for Gillian Mackay.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote for Gillian Mackay has been recorded.

The third vote is for Malcolm Offord. Members who wish to cast their vote for Malcolm Offord should vote yes now. You have 60 seconds in which to do so.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: Voting has closed. If any member believes that they were unable to cast their vote for Malcolm Offord, they should please let me know by making a point of order.

The fourth vote is for Anas Sarwar. Members who wish to cast their vote for Anas Sarwar should vote yes now. Again, the voting time is 60 seconds.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: Voting has closed. Any member who believes that they were unable to cast their vote for Anas Sarwar should please advise that they wish to make a point of order.

The fifth vote is for John Swinney. Members who wish to cast their vote for John Swinney should vote yes now. Once again, the voting time is 60 seconds.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The vote is closed. Should any member feel that they were unable to vote in that time, they should please make a point of order.

That concludes the votes for all candidates. On this occasion, we will also have an abstention vote, because it seems that not all members have voted. If any member did not vote in that round and wishes to record an abstention, they may abstain by pressing their yes button now. There are 60 seconds in which to vote for an abstention.

Members voted.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I pressed my button in error, so that can be disregarded.

The Presiding Officer: I am afraid that we cannot do that, unfortunately. The vote has been recorded already. Apologies, but that is the rule.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. It appears that I was unable to vote for Gillian Mackay earlier. I do not think that that was recorded. Could you check, if you do not mind? The vote was for Gillian Mackay.

The Presiding Officer: Yes, it was not recorded, but you had the opportunity to make a point of order at the time—as, indeed, one of your colleagues did—so I am afraid that that will not be recorded.

I should have said to Q Manivannan earlier that you should stand up to make your points of order. It is all right—we are all on a steep learning curve here.

Okay—[*Inaudible.*]

[*Laughter.*]

Unlike all the new MSPs, I was not given any explanation of how this tech works before I sat down here. That is happening at noon tomorrow for myself and the Deputy Presiding Officers, so things should be smoother thereafter.

We will now have a brief suspension while we tally up the votes.

15:04

Meeting suspended.

15:06

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The total number of votes cast for each candidate was as follows: Russell Findlay 11, Gillian Mackay 13, Malcolm Offord 17, Anas Sarwar 17, John Swinney 57, Abstentions 0.

The division list will be published as soon as possible.

The Presiding Officer: In total, 115 votes were cast. As there was no overall majority, we will go through another round of voting, but this time Russell Findlay will be eliminated. The following candidates are now before us: Gillian Mackay, Malcolm Offord, Anas Sarwar and John Swinney.

In this round, the first vote is for Gillian Mackay. Only members who wish to vote for Gillian Mackay should take part in this vote, by voting yes. No other member should vote. Once again, members have 60 seconds to vote.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The vote is closed. Any member who believes that they were unable to vote for Gillian Mackay should advise that they wish to make a point of order.

The next vote is for Malcolm Offord. Only members who wish to vote for Malcolm Offord should take part in this vote, by voting yes. No other member should vote. Members have 60 seconds to vote.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The vote is closed. If any colleague feels that they wanted to vote for Malcolm Offord but were unable to do so, please make a point of order now.

The next vote is for Anas Sarwar. Only members who wish to cast their vote for Anas Sarwar should take part in the vote, by voting yes. No other member should vote. Members have 60 seconds to vote.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The vote is closed. Any colleague who wished to vote for Anas Sarwar but feels that they were unable to do so should make a point of order now.

The next vote is for John Swinney. Only members who wish to cast their vote for John Swinney should take part in the vote, by voting yes. No other member should vote. Again, members have 60 seconds to vote.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The vote is closed. Any member who believes that they were unable to cast their vote for John Swinney should advise that they wished to do so by making a point of order now.

The final vote in this round is for any member who has not yet voted and who wishes to record an abstention. Members who wish to abstain should press their yes button. Members have 60 seconds to do so.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The vote is closed. Should any member who wished to abstain feel that they were unable to do so, now is their opportunity to make a point of order.

That concludes this round of voting. There will be a brief suspension while the votes are counted and verified.

15:15

Meeting suspended.

15:18

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: Colleagues, in this round of voting in the selection of the Parliament's nominee as First Minister, the number of votes cast for each candidate was as follows: Gillian Mackay 15, Malcolm Offord 17, Anas Sarwar 17, John Swinney 56, Abstentions 0.

The division list will be published as soon as possible.

The Presiding Officer: The number of votes cast was 105. As John Swinney has secured more than half of all the votes cast, I declare that he is now the First Minister of Scotland. [*Applause.*] I would like to congratulate the First Minister on his election.

I will now call each of the party leaders to respond.

15:19

Anas Sarwar: On behalf of the Scottish Labour Party, I congratulate John Swinney on his election as First Minister. I sincerely wish him well in office. To serve as First Minister is not only a great privilege but a profound responsibility. To hold that office at a time of such uncertainty brings to the role an added weight and responsibility.

We must all collectively rise to the challenges that we will face in this new session of our Parliament. To meet the challenges that are before us, we will need a new spirit of unity and co-operation, where we agree not just to shout louder when we disagree. That is what the people of Scotland demand, and it is what they deserve from their national Parliament, because the need for action cannot be clearer.

Scotland's NHS is still under severe pressure, with patients waiting too long in pain and families struggling to access care when they need it. Family budgets in Scotland are still under real strain, with too many people feeling that they are paying more and getting less. Scotland still has young people who are anxious about their future and communities that feel left behind by a politics that too often seems remote from their lives and from people across this country.

Those are the realities that the Parliament that has now been elected faces, and those realities demand seriousness from us all. My party and I will approach the new session of Parliament with that seriousness. Yes, we will hold the Government to account for the promises that it has made. Yes, we will challenge it where it falls short. Yes, we will hold its feet to the fire in the name of the people of Scotland.

Of course, there will be matters on which the First Minister and I profoundly disagree, and we will not be shy about saying so. It will be our responsibility to say that clearly and without hesitation. However, there will also be areas where the Parliament has a duty to rise above old habits and take action where we agree to make sure that we are getting things done for Scotland.

This country does not need five more years dominated by grievance, division and fall-outs while the pressures on people's lives continue to mount—it needs a Parliament that is focused on delivery. It needs action to bring down waiting lists. It needs action to make life more affordable and it needs action to create opportunity for our amazing young people, but it also needs a politics that is prepared to bring the country together rather than drive it apart. It needs a politics that will confront the politics of us versus them and the culture of fear and blame.

That is the standard by which the First Minister will be judged, and it is also the standard by which

this Parliament should judge itself. I promise that we will lead an effective but also a responsible Opposition, because that, too, is our duty. The purpose of this Parliament is not to perform for itself but to serve the people of this great country.

I again congratulate John Swinney on his election today. I wish him well, and I look forward to working with him, where we agree, to deliver for Scotland. More importantly, I say this to him: the real test begins now; of course, this will be a moment to celebrate victory, but it must be more than just a celebration of victory—now must be the moment when we focus on delivering for the people of Scotland. We wish him well in that endeavour.

15:23

Malcolm Offord: On behalf of Reform UK, I wish to offer my congratulations to John Swinney on being appointed as First Minister of Scotland. It is a historic moment for him, and it is a great responsibility to hold that office. Indeed, heavy is the head that wears the crown.

We in Opposition will always seek to find consensus where we can agree on one single issue, which is to make Scotland more successful and more prosperous. We will always seek to support policies that do that, but where we find policies that do not deliver that, we will scrutinise and challenge them. That is the role that we will take upon ourselves in this chamber.

The agenda to make Scotland more successful has to deal with a number of core issues, which we debated at length during the election campaign. There is no question but that tax is too high and too complicated in Scotland—for example, we know that in the NHS right now there are care workers who are managing their workflow to try to avoid being dragged into higher tax bands. That is unnecessary and needless. That needs to be looked at, and if the SNP comes forward with solutions on that, we will be supportive, because we believe that we will raise more tax revenue if we reward the people of Scotland and incentivise them.

Similarly, our energy prices are too high. We have policy at the moment that is driven by ideology. We will oppose that, and we will scrutinise carefully the £5 billion in the budget that is spent on net zero policies. I think that we would all agree that energy prices are a major component of the cost of living. Where we can find consensus in that area, we will, again, support the Government.

We need to get the right balance between work and welfare. The best form of welfare that anyone can have is a good job. We need to help our fellow citizens back into good jobs. We need to create

pathways to work. We have 750,000 Scots of working age who are not in work, and we need to help them back to work. That number is heading towards 1 million, and we cannot allow that to happen.

Young people need to be supported into good jobs. We need to challenge whether we should be sending 50 per cent of young people to university. Maybe we should be thinking more about college training and apprenticeships. We need good jobs that will not be taken away by artificial intelligence and in which young people can make a start in life. We need real, serious jobs such as welders, gas technicians, lab technicians, care workers and so on, and we will support any policies that are brought forward to support that.

Immigration needs to be fair and controlled. We urge the SNP to restore the local connection and only give priority need to local people so that we have cohesion in our local communities.

Some 93 per cent of Scots say that the NHS needs reform. We need greater access to general practitioners and we need to deal with delayed discharge. We will support action in those areas where the SNP comes forward with that agenda.

On value for money, it is interesting to note that all the parties agreed that quangos are out of control. There are too many of them and they cost too much. There is also a demographic deficit. We will support measures on value for money.

The idea here is that we all conducted the election campaign in a spirited manner and we found in a number of the debates that we agree on some of those issues. Let us therefore work together on them. However, Parliament should make no mistake about the role of Reform UK. Our 17 newly-minted MSPs have come in with one aim only, which is to drive forward an agenda that will make Scotland more successful and more prosperous. We will support any Government that delivers that.

15:26

Gillian Mackay: On behalf of the Scottish Greens, I congratulate John Swinney on his election as First Minister. It is a remarkable achievement to win a fifth term in office for the SNP. I think that it is safe to say that this is probably not the role that the First Minister anticipated this time last session and, on behalf of my party, I acknowledge the sacrifices that both he and his family have made to allow him to serve Scotland.

The Scottish Greens will work with his Government to deliver on our priorities and deliver for the people of Scotland. The Opposition parties that took that constructive approach in the

previous session of Parliament have grown in their numbers, and it is clear that that is what the public expect us to do. To put it simply, our constituents expect us to co-operate where we genuinely share values, even if we do not agree on every detail of policy.

That does not mean that this Government will have an easy time of it from the Greens. We will hold the Government to account and ask difficult questions. We need to see work quickly on childcare and free bus travel in particular, but other public services need support and reform, too. We will push for this Government to go further and faster, especially when it comes to tackling child poverty and the climate crisis.

In the first 100 days, this Government could fix some of the issues with childcare that we raised before dissolution. Ensuring that childcare is truly free at three would put hundreds of pounds back into families' pockets before we move to expand free hours to include two-year-olds on what we would like to be a universal basis. The 1,140-hour entitlement is a national policy, but some families have had to move their children twice due to changes made by local authorities. Working with councils to ensure that cross-boundary placements can happen would support families' choices.

We need to work together to put the NHS on a sustainable footing, we need to talk about how we support councils to deliver the services that they want to deliver, and we have to—finally—scrap and replace the council tax.

Ultimately, in the first 100 days of this Government, we need to see tangible work to deliver on the cost of living crisis and make people's lives cheaper for the long term, to support the climate, and to make Scotland more welcoming and outward looking. The Scottish Greens will not shy away from holding the new Government to account, but we look forward to working with the First Minister to deliver for the people of Scotland.

15:29

Russell Findlay: My party and I sincerely congratulate John Swinney on his re-election as First Minister. I commit to working constructively with him and his ministers when offers to do so are made in good faith.

John Swinney and I fundamentally disagree on the future direction of Scotland. In my opening remarks, I set out a vision for a more prosperous Scotland at the heart of the United Kingdom. John Swinney is not short of people offering him advice, but I ask him to hear me out about what I believe should be our collective focus. People desperately need some respite from endless SNP and Labour

tax rises. Growth and prosperity flow from educating our young people, creating opportunity, nurturing aspiration, rewarding success and giving businesses the space and support to thrive.

Economic growth will be absolutely critical, because there is a looming £5 billion black hole in Scotland's public finances. Throughout the election campaign, I repeatedly warned about the potential impact of that vast and impending deficit. Others did not want to talk about it but, with the election now behind us, there is no escaping from that hard reality.

To plug the gap between the revenues raised and Government spending commitments, John Swinney is likely to do one of two things—and, possibly, both. One is to cut funding for public services; the other is to raise taxes. Both would be a mistake. Do not cut front-line services. Cut the waste and the quangos, treat taxpayers' money with respect and cut a benefits bill that is unaffordable and unsustainable. On taxes, I say this: no more. Scots already pay almost £2 billion more a year in income tax than they would for doing the same jobs elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Businesses have been hit with sky-high rates bills that will force some to cut jobs or cease trading altogether.

Mr Swinney might not choose to listen to me, but he should listen to Scotland's business leaders, who repeatedly warn that we cannot tax our way to economic growth. John Swinney knows that to be true but, even though he knows about the perilous state of the public finances, my fear is that he will remain distracted. He has already said that he will make the first vote of the Parliament a demand for another referendum—even without a majority. That is his intent. He knows that the people of Scotland do not want that, yet we heard it again from him today. For the sake of Scotland, drop it, Mr Swinney. Put country before party. End the politics of grievance. Stop blaming others for the many problems that have been made by the SNP over two decades. Govern for all of Scotland.

My party will continue to stand up for hard-working Scots who are struggling to pay the bills. We will be honest about the hard choices that lie ahead and we will work tirelessly to hold the Government to account.

15:33

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Each of us—the 129 MSPs who were sworn into the Parliament last week and all the former MSPs whom I see scattered around the public gallery—knows what it feels like to be elected to serve your community. It is a pretty awesome and wonderful experience. I can only imagine what it must feel like to be elected to serve and lead your country. I therefore

congratulate John Swinney. This is a moment of immense personal pride for him, as it will be for his family and friends in the gallery. I congratulate all of them.

More than a quarter of a century ago, the architects of the Parliament—of the precepts and all the rules that we follow in this place—agreed that the building was to be forged around consensus and the pursuit of respectful compromise, where that could be found. All too often, we have fallen short of that ideal. As I said in the closing hours of the previous session, the promise of the new session is that we should reach for that compromise, where we can find it.

Right now, trust in politics is at an all-time low. People are tired and frustrated, and they are right to be. They look to the Parliament for answers about why they cannot get their operation, why their child's classroom is not as good as it used to be, why education standards are falling down the international league tables and why they cannot get access to care at the first time of asking, and yet they have seen the division and rancour in the chamber that holds back so much. We owe it to them to lay as much of that aside as possible.

I said throughout the campaign that the change that Scotland really needs is a change of Government, and I still believe that to my fingertips. However, although the question of who governs us is now settled and I recognise that the SNP will control the Parliament for the next five years, I make an undertaking that, where we can, Liberal Democrat MSPs will strive to get things done, because that is what we got elected to do. This is where I lean into the words of an unlikely supporter of the Liberal Democrats: Kemi Badenoch, who said that a Liberal Democrat is somebody who turns up and fixes your church roof. Guilty as charged, Presiding Officer—that is exactly what we stand for in our communities. We sweat the small stuff, such as who takes out the bins or sorts the potholes, but we will also always reach for policy that deals with the big issues of our time, such as the crisis in our social care service, in our health service and in our educational institutions, higher, primary and secondary. We will also reach for policy that helps people half a world away, whom we may never meet, because that is what Liberal Democrats fundamentally believe. We are communitarians, both in the local communities that we are elected to serve and in the global community in which we find ourselves.

This is a proud day for John Swinney, and I am sure that I take him at his word when he says that he will look for consensus. I will offer that where we can find it. However, we are also not afraid to say no, as we have done many times in the past. John F Kennedy once said to a White House correspondents' dinner:

“Without debate, without criticism, no Administration and no country can succeed—and no republic can survive.”

We will offer that when it is merited. It will sometimes be fierce, but it will always be liberal. However, we will never be too big to reach for the consensus that improves the lives of the people who gave us our instructions and sent us to this chamber. I congratulate John Swinney and his party today, and I offer that commitment to reach for consensus where we can find it.

The Presiding Officer: I call Scotland's new First Minister, John Swinney, for up to 10 minutes.

15:37

The First Minister (John Swinney): It is a profound honour to accept Parliament's nomination for the office of First Minister. I thank Parliament for its support and I thank the leaders of the Opposition parties for the generous comments that they have made. I realise that they will have their criticisms to make; I am sure that there will be many of them in the years to come. However, I also look forward to working collaboratively with others to advance the interests of the people of Scotland, and I will cover more of that in what I will say today.

I commit myself today to upholding the standards and ideals of this Parliament, as I have done throughout the 27 years in which I have had the privilege to serve as a member of this Parliament, and to leading a Government that meets the aspirations of the people who sent us here. Public service demands much of us all and, as we begin this parliamentary session, I pay tribute to the commitment of all members in being prepared to serve the people of Scotland. Although we volunteer for this task, we do so knowing that our public service has an implication for those close to us. I am immensely grateful to all those who have helped me to reach this point today, of whom there are too many to mention, but a large number of whom are here in the gallery today.

A particular burden is carried by my family, who, as Alex Cole-Hamilton mentioned, might reasonably have expected me to be slightly more available for them than I am these days. To each of them, I express my thanks for their love and support. Every day, I am supported in what I do by my wife, Elizabeth, who demonstrates a strength, a tenacity and a determination in the face of increasing adversity and challenge that is awe inspiring. Elizabeth's approach to life is, of itself, a very valuable example of how to act to any First Minister, especially her First Minister. I literally cannot offer myself to be the First Minister of Scotland without the sacrifices that Elizabeth is

prepared to make, and I acknowledge and thank her for that this afternoon. [*Applause.*]

Today, I feel many of the same emotions as I did when I first became First Minister two years ago—the same sense of humility and the same profound awareness of the weight of responsibility and the remarkable privilege of holding this office. However, today is very different from the moment when I stood here two years ago to accept office as First Minister. I stand here at the start of a new session of Parliament with a resounding personal mandate from the people of Scotland. I offered the people of Scotland reliable, trusted and experienced leadership in turbulent times, and today I pledge to provide that to my country.

The people have chosen a Government that is firmly on their side—a Government that listens to them and turns their personal priorities into national ones, and a Government that acts decisively on the breadth and scale that are needed to meet those challenges. That is the kind of Government that I intend to lead.

I have ambitious goals for this parliamentary session—to ease the cost of living crisis by expanding on what is already the best package of support in the United Kingdom; to ensure that the NHS is protected and easy to access, always there for people when and where they need it; to ensure cohesion in our communities; to protect our environment, grow our economy and create opportunity across the country; and to make concrete, tangible differences that people can see and feel in their homes, communities and day-to-day lives.

I look forward to working with members in this chamber to achieve all of those goals. I am aware that we will be working in a very different session of Parliament to the ones that have preceded it. One in two of my fellow members is new, and I recognise that, although my party is by far and away the largest in the chamber, we do not have a majority on our own. However, I remain firmly of the view that, when we engage in constructive dialogue, we are capable of tremendous progress. I believe that I can achieve a majority for every ambition that I have for this Parliament, and I look forward to working with many here to do so. That, of course, includes the question of Scotland's constitutional future, on which I recognise there are profound differences of opinion, but the people have now elected the largest pro-independence majority in the history of devolution.

The Scottish people have yet again made their wishes known, loud and clear. They want a more secure and a more prosperous independent nation, one in which decisions are made not in Westminster but here in Scotland. My Government will continue to seek to abide by those wishes, and

again I look forward to working with many in the chamber to do so. However, independent or not, I want to make one thing clear to Parliament and the public today. I will work to be a First Minister for all of Scotland—a First Minister who works to bring people together with a strong sense of national purpose. The country that I seek to build is a country where everyone feels accepted and able to contribute to our national story; a country where we seek to bring communities together; a country where we act to heal division; and a country where we seek to find common ground.

The election result proves that the people of Scotland believe that theirs is a country of boundless potential—a country that can be more prosperous, more equal and more confident in her future; a country of fair, well-paid work and of vibrant, multicultural, safe communities; a country that cares for its natural resources and sees the transition to clean energy as both an environmental necessity and an economic opportunity; and a country that puts our collective prosperity back into the communities that work for it. The people of Scotland want Scotland to realise that potential and they have tasked us with working together to make that the case.

Presiding Officer, the idea of working together is where I conclude my remarks today. At the dawn of the seventh session of the Scottish Parliament, I am now one of only four members from the original class of 1999; of course, Presiding Officer, you are also one of that class. From that vantage point, I offer this reflection to the many new members. This is a very exciting time in any Parliament. We all rightly feel the privilege of having been chosen by the people of Scotland to represent them, and we are all full of anticipation for the exciting journey that lies ahead. However, it will not be long before we have to return to the people to explain to them what we have done for them.

If there is one thing that I have learned over my years in public service, it is this. When the five-year term ends, it is those who can look their constituents in the eye and say that they have achieved things for them who win re-election. All too often in Parliaments, I have watched members celebrate when bold proposals are blocked, seemingly for political expediency rather than for any substantial concerns. There was a time when even I thought that negative politics worked into the bargain. However, I stand here today, having won a resounding mandate from the people of Scotland, because, in this election, my party offered a vision of hope, ambition and optimism. Now, I offer to work across party lines to deliver our agenda.

By electing a Parliament of minorities, the people have given us a specific instruction to work

together. Voters value co-operation among their politicians; they want to see more of it and, in this session of Parliament, I will work to see more of it, too.

I gratefully accept the opportunity to serve as First Minister. It is the greatest privilege of my life, and I promise to work every day to repay the trust that the people of Scotland have placed in me. *[Applause.]*

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the selection of a First Minister.

Urgent Question

15:46

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is an urgent question. In order to get in as many members as possible—a number of members have supplementaries—I would prefer short and succinct questions, and answers to match.

Football Disorder in Glasgow (Discussions)

1. **Adam Harley (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Police Scotland, local authorities and football stakeholders following the disorder seen in Glasgow city centre last weekend.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): As the First Minister has stated, the Scottish Government utterly condemns the incidents of violence, vandalism and antisocial behaviour that took place on Saturday. Although the vast majority of fans are well-behaved, it is clear that when a minority are not, the impacts on policing and on a range of services are enormous, and it is the taxpayer who foots the bill. We fully support Police Scotland, and I have sent my best wishes to the officers who were injured in the disorder while helping someone with a medical emergency.

Ministers have been regularly updated on events and the Scottish Government has engaged with Police Scotland, Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Professional Football League, and incoming ministers will do so again. They will make it clear that governing bodies and individual clubs must step up and use their influence to help tackle this continuing misconduct.

Adam Harley: I thank the cabinet secretary for that reply and I, too, wish the police officers who were injured on Saturday a speedy recovery.

The overwhelming majority of supporters enjoyed their day responsibly, and it is important that any measures that may come forward do not unfairly impact or punish law-abiding fans. However, does the cabinet secretary agree that all football clubs and relevant authorities have a shared responsibility to minimise the risk of disorder around major fixtures and celebrations? Where such preparations require to be backed by funding, where does the Government think that that should come from?

Angela Constance: I thank Mr Harley for his question and congratulate him on being the first member to lodge an urgent question successfully in this new session of Parliament.

He is quite correct to state that the majority of sports fans and football fans are law abiding, but we have seen the consequences when the mindless minority has an impact on our communities and on our policing, and that cannot be tolerated. We must all—Government, local authorities, other stakeholders, the football authorities and football clubs—act together.

I stand here as the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, and it is clear to me that, if there had been a managed, organised celebration, the impact on policing would have been much less than it was. Police Scotland had to deploy more than 900 police officers, and two of those were significantly harmed. We must reflect on that, and each and every stakeholder must get on the same page and ensure that, where possible, we minimise the risk of it happening again.

Adam Harley: It is also not right that local businesses should have to close or clean up. There was a significant impact on local businesses over the weekend. People need to know in advance where in the city will be impacted, so that any future disruption can be managed, whether that is through fan zones, open-top bus parades or whatever other way people want to celebrate. For that to happen, we need co-ordination and leadership.

What further guidance can the Scottish Government provide in order to prevent a repeat of the disruption that we saw at the weekend?

Angela Constance: It is useful to note two things. First, if the result had been different, there was a well-planned and co-ordinated arrangement for a celebration in Edinburgh.

The second factor is that, with good, visible, local leadership, operation moonbeam has taken action all year round in response to the fireworks-related violence and disruption that have blighted our communities. Making clear the consequences of such behaviour has driven down violence and disorder around fireworks. We need to learn from operation moonbeam in that respect.

Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform): The scenes that we witnessed in Glasgow at the weekend were beyond disgraceful, but let us be blunt—they happen way too often. Glaswegians should not have to live with such violence, vandalism and behaviour every year, and clubs must take responsibility.

Does the minister agree that, rather than taxpayers, Celtic Football Club and other teams must start paying the bill for disruption and destruction when such incidents happen?

Angela Constance: As I intimated in my original answer, which I will repeat for clarity, governing bodies and individual clubs must step up and use

their influence to help to tackle this continued misconduct. My view is that nothing should be off the table now. I will do what I can within my powers, as will any minister in this Government, but no solution should be off the table. We all need to get on the same page and prevent such disorder from happening in the first place.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Presiding Officer, I welcome you to your position.

Does the Government agree with Glasgow City Council's claim that it is simply not possible to establish an official managed fan zone because the council cannot bear the burden of the cost? Given that the impact of football in Glasgow is equivalent to hosting a Commonwealth games every year, could the Government show some leadership in pulling together funding between the local authority, national Government, commercial sponsors and the football clubs to establish an official fan zone, to prevent Glasgow's streets and emergency services from being subjected to entirely preventable disorder every year?

Angela Constance: I have to be candid with members—as justice secretary, I had a full briefing from Police Scotland on Friday about the preparations that had been made, irrespective of the result. I contrast the preparations that were made in one half of the country with the preparations that were made in the other half. Therefore, I must respectfully disagree with some of the commentary from Glasgow City Council.

I repeat what I said to Mr Kerr: no solutions should be off the table. We all have something to bring to the table, and we have to prevent such disorder from happening again. Prevention falls on us all. It is not down to Police Scotland to be the only player in this; the organisation and its officers should not be exposed to such behaviour. We know from other experiences that good planning prevents or, at least, reduces the risk of disorder. We need to plan not just in the weeks and months ahead; like operation moonbeam, that has to be a consistent endeavour, with good local leadership.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I have lost count of the number of times that questions like this one have been asked in relation to an incident like this one. The citizens of Glasgow are as sick of it as we are—more so, in fact.

The behaviour of fans—of whichever club—in such incidents is unacceptable. Surely, it is not enough for the cabinet secretary to talk about encouraging clubs to step up and share responsibility. Is it not time that we were very clear and that we made clubs face legal consequences for the actions of their fans in such circumstances?

Angela Constance: I appreciate thoroughly that the good people of Glasgow and the

communities impacted by the disorder will be at their wits' end. As Mr Sweeney said, aspects of that behaviour are predictable, as we have seen over the years.

Mr Harvie will be aware of the action that this Government is prepared to take—it is in our manifesto—in relation to widening the scope of football banning orders. I am open to any review involving, for example, the criminal law in such matters. That does not, by any stretch of the imagination, allow any other partner, the football authorities or football clubs to walk away from their responsibilities. No solution should be off the table.

We need to get together and have very frank, but respectful, conversations. We all need to get on the same page to prevent this from happening. There is evidence that, where they have been implemented in Scotland and elsewhere in Europe, sporting sanctions have an impact.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Scottish Police Federation joint central committee minutes from May 2025 warned of “low staffing levels” in public order policing. Given the appalling disorder in Glasgow, the estimated 3,000 people involved, the serious injuries to officers and the fact that we have 1,000 fewer officers since 2020, will the cabinet secretary seek assurances from the chief constable that Police Scotland is funded and resourced sufficiently for the specialist public order capacity that it needs?

Angela Constance: One advantage of having a national police force is that more than 900 police officers were deployed. I mentioned in an earlier answer that if there had been an organised celebration event, the requirements placed on policing would have been less. At the risk of raking over the coals of old arguments, it is this Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs who negotiated with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government to provide record funding of £1.7 billion for police in Scotland. If I recall, I was the only person in budget negotiations to make that pitch; no members or spokespeople of the previous Opposition parties made such a request to Ms Robison.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Attacks on our police officers, who are simply doing their job, are unacceptable. In order to identify those who were responsible for criminal behaviour last Saturday, the police need all the tools that are available. However, closed-circuit television coverage of Glasgow city centre is no longer available 24/7 due to funding cuts. Will the cabinet secretary—and, I hope, the First Minister—assure the Parliament that, in any future discussions on how we police effectively, and in identifying those responsible, prosecuting them and ensuring that they know that the rule of law will be enforced, she

will address the full operation of CCTV in Glasgow, which is Scotland's largest city?

Angela Constance: There is an important role for CCTV and for other tactics that Police Scotland, in partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders, has at its disposal. I hasten to add that, as events this week show, Police Scotland and prosecutors have a good record of bringing to justice those who are intent on mobbing, rioting, vandalism and antisocial behaviour at football matches. It is important that we all work together to ensure that the police have the tools of the trade.

I commend our police force: they are very good at following up on disorder. Those who think that they have walked off free should be wary of any celebration, because Police Scotland will leave no stone unturned in bringing to justice people who have been on the wrong side of the law.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that clubs and fan organisations have a significant role to play in encouraging responsible behaviour among supporters? Will she encourage further engagement among all groups and representatives of the local community to find ways of preventing such antisocial behaviour in the future, given its significant impact on residents and businesses in my Glasgow Central constituency over many years?

Angela Constance: I agree with the cut and thrust of Ms Thewliss's question and that action is required now. It is clear from evidence in Scotland and further afield that, when we connect fans' behaviour to consequences, that has an impact. As with many issues, there will be more than one solution. I repeat what I said earlier: no solution should be off the table, because we must get into a better space in order to prevent this from happening in the future.

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Such disorder is to be deplored. Given the cabinet secretary's favourable comments on the plans and arrangements in Edinburgh, is she of the opinion that the events in Glasgow reflect a failure of planning and preparedness by Glasgow City Council?

Angela Constance: I say candidly to Mr Kerr and to the chamber that it is imperative that we see good, strong local leadership. That must involve local authorities, but it must also involve football authorities and football clubs. I draw a contrast—based on a briefing that I had from the chief constable and Police Scotland—with the well-coordinated set of arrangements that would have been in place had Heart of Midlothian Football Club won the match. Policing of celebratory

functions requires a co-ordinated plan, as that complements the policing response.

I say to everyone, without fear or favour, that we all need to get a grip and get on the same page.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. I had intended to finish the urgent question at this point, but a further three members wish to ask questions. I will allow them to do so, as there is clearly a lot of interest in this topic.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): I am most grateful, Presiding Officer.

Prior to the shocking scenes in Glasgow city centre, there was a rather unseemly pitch invasion at Celtic Park. That was not the first time that it had happened this season. As a football fan, I am sickened to see such things.

I was surprised to learn that pitch invasions are illegal in England but not in Scotland. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we need to take action to close that loophole? If she agrees to close the loophole, action should be taken swiftly against those who break any new law.

Angela Constance: I appreciate Mr Simpson's point about pitch invasions and the law. In Scotland, we have breach of the peace and section 38 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010. Although I am of the view that the legislative provision is broad enough to enable a range of behaviours to be dealt with, I will nonetheless practise what I preach, keep an open mind and consider what further action we can take in terms of changes to criminal law.

As I mentioned to Patrick Harvie, we are taking forward work on football banning orders. It may well be that, following further consultation, we could consider criminalising pitch invasions as part of that endeavour.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): This Saturday, Dunfermline Athletic will meet Celtic in the Scottish cup final. That is great for Fife and for the club's supporters. What discussions has the cabinet secretary had with Glasgow City Council, Police Scotland and the clubs to ensure that we do not see a repeat of the terrible scenes that we saw last weekend?

Angela Constance: Let me assure Ms Baker that I and my officials will reach out to her local team and Police Scotland in the hope that we can reassure her with regard to this weekend.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): After the pitch invasion occurred, the Scottish Professional Football League released a statement calling on the Scottish Government to introduce legislation to make it an offence to encroach on a football pitch, just as it is in England

and Wales. That would not be a panacea, although I note that, in 2018, the English Football Association fined West Ham United Football Club £100,000 because its fans invaded the pitch. However, it seems to me that that call is a deflection tactic by the SPFL. For years, it has refused to discuss strict liability for football clubs failing to take responsibility for fans in and around the stadium. If the cabinet secretary is engaging with the football authorities, will she pursue them on the consideration of strict liability?

Angela Constance: Mr Brown is quite correct to say that, despite pitch invasion being a specific offence in England and Wales, pitch invasions still occur there. However, I will look at the issue in good faith. We intend to legislate for football banning orders, and we can widen the scope of our endeavours in that area. We will need to look at the issue very closely, but I am open to doing that.

I will repeat what I said earlier. Even if the Scottish Government were to change the law, that would not for one minute let any other stakeholder, either locally or nationally, off the hook. I say to football clubs and the football authorities, with all respect, that they are within their rights to call on the Government to change legislation, but, standing here today as the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, having seen the impact on policing this weekend, I am also well within my rights to call on them to step up to the plate.

The Presiding Officer: I thank the 10 colleagues who asked those questions and I thank the cabinet secretary for her stamina in responding to them.

Business Motion

16:07

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of motion S7M-00074, in the name of Tom Arthur, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the programme of business for this week.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business for Thursday 21 May 2026—

2.30pm Parliamentary Bureau Motion (if required)

followed by Appointment of Scottish Ministers and Junior Scottish Ministers

followed by Election of Members to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

followed by Presiding Officer's Proposals for the Parliamentary Week

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions (if required)—
[Tom Arthur]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

16:07

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of motion S7M-00075, in the name of Tom Arthur, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on standing orders.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees, with effect from 21 May 2026, that under Rule 3.6.2, the number of appointed Members of the Parliamentary Corporation for this session shall be six.—[Tom Arthur]

Decision Time

16:08

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson):

There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. The question is, that motion S7M-00075, in the name of Tom Arthur, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on standing orders, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees, with effect from 21 May 2026, that under Rule 3.6.2, the number of appointed Members of the Parliamentary Corporation for this session shall be six.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time, and I will close the meeting. However, before any members leave, I would like to ask all of you to please stay in the chamber so that we can have our official group photograph for the 2026-31 session taken.

Meeting closed at 16:08.

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