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## Scottish Parliament

Thursday 28 May 2026

*[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 12:00]*

### First Minister's Question Time

**The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson):** Good afternoon, colleagues. Before we move to party leaders' questions, I remind back-bench members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak button when Alex Cole-Hamilton rises to speak. Please do not start your question with "To ask the First Minister". "First Minister," or some other beginning is fine. Back benchers will have one question, in order to let in as many members as possible, so there will be no supplementary questions for back benchers. We move to leaders' questions.

#### Scottish National Party (Culture)

1. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** This week, Peter Murrell, the former chief executive officer of the Scottish National Party, pled guilty to embezzling more than £400,000 of supporters' hard-earned cash. He will have to answer for his crimes, which will be a matter for the courts.

However, questions remain about the deeper culture that allowed him to commit—and think that he could get away with—his crimes. It is a culture that has been a hallmark of not just how the SNP runs its party but how it governs the country. It is a culture of secrecy and cover-up, in which the public are not told the truth, dissenters are vilified and careers are destroyed; in which protecting the party and the people at its top is more important than the country; and in which there is a sick and twisted belief that the cause is bigger than anything else. Will John Swinney apologise to all those who have been the victims of that dangerous culture?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** As I said in answer to the urgent question that I responded to on Tuesday and in my public remarks on Monday, I am appalled at the conduct of Peter Murrell. As the police statement said on Monday, this was a lengthy and extremely complex case due to the scale of criminality over a 12-year period and the lengths to which Peter Murrell went to try to cover his tracks. It was a terrible example of behaviour and a breach of trust in public office, which I unreservedly condemn; I have made that abundantly clear.

Members of my party, who have lost out as a consequence of seeing their donations and contributions not being used for the purposes for which they are intended—I am one of those people, because I am a contributor to the SNP, as are all my colleagues—live with the consequences of those totally unacceptable actions. These issues have been addressed by a lengthy police investigation, and Peter Murrell is now facing the consequences of his actions.

As for the remainder of Mr Sarwar's comments, I simply note that he has peddled all of this for the past five years, unreservedly, aided by his deputy, who is sitting beside him. However, the people of Scotland made their verdict on 7 May, and they returned 58 SNP MSPs to this Parliament and the Labour Party was reduced in its numbers. I think that Mr Sarwar should change his script, because his script is not working.

**Anas Sarwar:** That arrogant disposition of John Swinney is what has destroyed so many people's lives in his own political party. John Swinney has been at the heart of the SNP for 30 years. He helped to build, enable and defend its culture. I say to members on the SNP benches that many of their colleagues and supporters were victims of that culture and many of those with whom they now sit were part of it or benefited from that culture.

Yes, Peter Murrell is responsible for his crimes, but secrecy and cover-up go far beyond one individual or one case. At the heart of the case is an SNP culture in which secrecy became normal, dissent was dangerous and people learned that speaking out carried a heavy price, all while those at the top of the SNP machine operated without scrutiny.

Yesterday, we called for a parliamentary inquiry, as this is now a matter of public trust and integrity in office. John Swinney now says that he believes in honesty and transparency, so he should prove it. Will he back a parliamentary inquiry?

**The First Minister:** No, I will not back a parliamentary inquiry on that issue. The reason why I will not back a parliamentary inquiry is that we have just had a police investigation, which has gone on for five years. That police investigation identified criminality as the source of this particular issue; that is now being remedied in

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the courts. I do not think that there is anything that a parliamentary inquiry can add to a five-year forensic police investigation that has resulted in the successful prosecution of an individual and in his guilty plea.

What I would rather do is concentrate on the priorities of the people of Scotland, as I always do—whether those are reducing waiting times in our hospitals, providing support to first-time buyers or making sure that we expand early learning and childcare. That is what I am going to do, because I am a First Minister on Scotland's side.

**Anas Sarwar:** The purpose of a parliamentary inquiry would not be to look into the criminality—that is, of course, for the police to do. It would be to look at the culture, the process of decision making and lessons for the future. It would be to answer the many questions that the public have. That requires light and transparency, not the usual John Swinney and SNP playbook of shutting down or deflecting.

We have seen the dangerous outcomes of that culture: victims who reported the abuse by Patrick Grady threatened with legal and disciplinary action; SNP officials bullied and forced out by a First Minister for trying to reveal Murrell's crimes; female MSPs bugged by SNP staff and then ignored by party leaders; and seven North Lanarkshire councillors forced out of the party for raising concerns about paedophile Jordan Linden. It is a culture that puts victims last, as though they are a threat to the cause.

John Swinney has a choice. Will he back a parliamentary inquiry or will he double down on protecting a culture that he helped to build and that enabled a man that he appointed to embezzle more than £400,000?

**The First Minister:** That was an astonishing attempt at victim blaming by Anas Sarwar. He should be ashamed of himself and of what he said. There is one person, and one person alone, who is responsible for the embezzlement of my party's funds—and that is Peter Murrell.

When I became leader of the SNP, I promised to my party that there would be open dialogue, debate and scrutiny within our party, and that is precisely what I have delivered. That was just one of the many promises that I gave to the SNP and to the people of Scotland. I also promised that I would unite my party, and I succeeded in doing so, which is why there are 58 of us over here while there are 17 of them over there, on the Labour benches.

As my last word to Mr Sarwar on the subject, I say to him gently that people in glass houses should not throw stones. He knows that the Labour Party is up to its neck in difficulty, whether it is about live criminal cases that involve former members of this Parliament or about Peter Mandelson and his influence over the Labour Government. Anas Sarwar has not got a leg to stand on in taking me to task on those issues.

### **North Sea Gas Licensing**

**2. Malcolm Offord (West Scotland) (Reform):** Today, we are importing 70 per cent of our gas from Norwegian gas fields in the North Sea, over the fence from our own gas fields that we are shutting down. Even the Norwegian energy minister thinks that that is daft. Will the First Minister state categorically that the Scottish Government will support the licensing of our own North Sea gas?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government's position is that if new developments are to be taken forward, they have to pass a climate compatibility assessment to ensure that the extraction of those resources is compatible with our journey to net zero. In that judgment, consideration must also be given to the issues around security of energy supply.

The first part of my answer, in relation to climate compatibility assessments, is that there is a requirement on us to be compatible with the most recent Finch judgment on consenting of oil and gas licences. The second part of my answer, on security of supply, is that we must take into account the much more volatile circumstances that we now face as a consequence of what has happened in the middle east in recent weeks and months. That is the Scottish Government's position. Obviously, the decision making on the issue is a matter for the United Kingdom Government—it must take the decision as to whether those tests can be satisfied as a consequence of any new licences that are issued.

**Malcolm Offord:** I have to say that that was a pretty mealy-mouthed response from the First Minister, because all that it means is that we will end up being tied up in court action to work out whether those tests have been met. In the meantime, 1,000 jobs a month are being lost in the North Sea.

Can the First Minister give unequivocal support for, for example, new drilling licences for the Jackdaw and Rosebank fields? Given that licensing and planning are under the control of the Scottish Government, it needs to step forward and make that happen for the people of the north-east.

**The First Minister:** I understand the seriousness of the point that Mr Offord puts to me, but it is not me who is deferring to court action. I am dealing with the realities of living within the rule of law, which, as I have set out to Parliament, matters very much to me in how I conduct myself publicly. The Finch judgment requires

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climate compatibility assessments to be undertaken, so we cannot wish that requirement away. That is not a mealy-mouthed position; it is a reflection of the legal reality around us.

I say to Mr Offord that I recognise that circumstances and dynamics have changed because of the situation in the middle east. One of our worries about supply is about jet fuel. Of course, jet fuel was manufactured at Grangemouth, which was closed by the Labour Government, despite Anas Sarwar telling me in an election debate in 2024 that it would be saved by a Labour Government.

We have careful judgments to make on the issue, but the assurance that I give to Parliament today—and, crucially, to oil and gas workers in the north-east of Scotland—is that the Scottish Government will make all the interventions that it can to ensure that we secure the future of those individuals who are affected by the downturn in oil and gas.

**Malcolm Offord:** During the election, the First Minister promised that his first debate in the chamber would be on the constitution, which would be followed by a request for a section 30 notice, and he has met that promise. During the election, the Labour Government promised that it would reject any application for such a section 30 notice, and it has done that. During the election, the First Minister promised that, if his section 30 notice application was rejected, he had a cunning plan to get a referendum.

The debate on the constitution was on Tuesday, and the First Minister's request was rejected on Wednesday. It is now Thursday. Is it time for the First Minister to reveal his cunning plan, or has Peter Murrell stolen that as well?

**The First Minister:** The point of substance that Malcolm Offord puts to me is an important one, because it gets to the heart of our democratic politics. I am not going to just kowtow to 10 Downing Street. The people of Scotland have decided, this Parliament has an independence majority, and I will use that independence majority to deliver independence for our country.

### **Taxation Powers**

**3. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Green):** The Scottish Greens were the only party at the election to say that we need to use our full taxation powers to raise more money, particularly from the wealth of the super-rich.

Today, the Tax Justice Scotland coalition wrote to the First Minister calling for a post-election reality check of Scotland's public finances. In its words,

"if we want a fairer and greener country, we need to invest in it. You can't promise a better Scotland and avoid paying for it."

We know that public sector reform is badly needed, but trade unions in particular are rightly concerned that reform is usually a euphemism for slashing budgets and cutting jobs. Does the First Minister agree with the Scottish Greens and Tax Justice Scotland that we should explore all options for taxing wealth before cutting public sector jobs?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** As Gillian Mackay will know from her experience in the previous parliamentary session, any budget proposition involves a combination of tax and spending decisions. In meeting those requirements, the Government considers the opportunities to raise tax and the consequences of raising tax, and the opportunities to undertake public expenditure and the impact that that public expenditure could have.

We will obviously need to have very open discussions. The Deputy First Minister will lead those discussions on behalf of the Government, and Ivan McKee will also be engaged in discussions on how we can secure greater impact from the way in which we undertake public expenditure.

Although I totally respect and understand the concerns of trade unions, we also need to be open to new ways of delivering public services. I have seen some fantastic work being delivered that has cost less but has delivered better outcomes for individuals. At the heart of the work that Ivan McKee is bringing forward is making sure that we improve public services while delivering financial sustainability for the public purse.

Of course, without a majority in the Parliament, the Government will need to work with others to come to common positions. I look forward to taking those discussions forward with many colleagues from across the political spectrum.

**Gillian Mackay:** I appreciate that response from the First Minister and, in a second, I will come on to an idea about how we can deliver more from the public sector. I am sure that the new Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform will have plenty of difficult decisions to make. However, as the First Minister reflected, it is crucial that those decisions are not just about looking for cuts that can be dressed up as efficiencies but are about how we continue to build on the work that the public sector is doing to drive up productivity and wellbeing so that workers feel valued and are able to do their jobs well.

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In the previous session, the Scottish Greens secured a pioneering trial of a four-day working week in the public sector, which resulted in a 25 per cent drop in mental health sick days and no loss of service delivery or productivity. Although our finances remain stretched, rolling out a four-day week would help to transform public sector work at no extra cost to the public purse. Will the First Minister commit to expanding the four-day week in the public sector?

**The First Minister:** I am very happy to consider those issues. It is obviously a bit too early in the parliamentary session for me to give a commitment that is quite as firm as the one that Gillian Mackay has invited me to make today. However, there is a deadly serious point at the heart of her question, which is that the environment in which public servants work really matters. If that environment is burdened by excessive bureaucracy or by slowness in decision making, that can have a negative effect on individuals in carrying out their responsibilities. Those considerations are at the heart of what Ivan McKee is looking to do, which is to ensure that we utilise the effectiveness of public expenditure to the maximum extent so that public servants are able to fulfil their roles and we can deliver better outcomes for members of the public in Scotland.

**Gillian Mackay:** If it is a wee bit early for cast-iron commitments, the First Minister might not enjoy my next question.

The Scottish Greens have already shown that we can work constructively and creatively to raise more money for public services. Income tax changes that have been driven by Green MSPs over the past decade mean that our public services are now better off to the tune of £1.8 billion each year. However, we cannot fix Scotland's public finances without fixing how we fund our local councils. For too long, the claim that we need a consensus to replace the council tax has been used as an excuse not to take action. If the First Minister wants to scrap the council tax to fund public services, the Scottish Greens will work with him—that would be a parliamentary majority for change. Will the First Minister work with us to scrap the council tax in this parliamentary session?

**The First Minister:** As I told the Parliament on Tuesday, I want this to be a bold Parliament. Therefore, there must be reform in this parliamentary session—we simply cannot go on as we are just now. There are legitimate issues regarding the council tax and its fairness, on which I have a great deal of sympathy. Later today, the Deputy First Minister is meeting local authority leaders to start the constructive dialogue that I want to see in place. The Government will be willing to engage with the Scottish Green Party on all issues, including on reform and potential abolition of the council tax. However, we need to have in place reliable means that will support public finances and the delivery of public services. That is the key consideration that will be brought to those discussions by the Scottish Government.

#### **Publication of Information (Lord Advocate)**

**4. Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** The Peter Murrell scandal is not just about the Scottish National Party's toxic internal culture; it goes to the heart of Government and Scotland's justice system. John Swinney and Nicola Sturgeon did not stop Peter Murrell; they enabled him. Sturgeon warned SNP members to stop asking difficult questions and John Swinney assured everyone that the SNP's finances were sound. Their shield of protection gave Murrell a licence to steal. People want to know why Nicola Sturgeon was not in the dock beside her husband. Will John Swinney back our call for the Lord Advocate to publish all the information that relates to the case?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Mr Findlay is an experienced parliamentarian and also an experienced journalist who has looked at many issues of criminality over his career. As the Crown Office pointed out to Mr Findlay yesterday, the Crown does not disclose the rationale for its taking decisions, other than where it pursues prosecutions against individuals. The Crown has undertaken a successful prosecution here, and I pay tribute to the Crown Office and to Police Scotland.

The Crown also made it clear to Mr Findlay yesterday that the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General—the law officers—had no involvement in this case. They never have an involvement in cases involving political figures, which are all undertaken by independent counsel and experienced Crown counsel within the Crown Office.

That assurance, which was given by the Crown to Mr Findlay yesterday, is designed to explain that the highest standards have been applied to a deep and forensic criminal investigation, which resulted in the prosecution of one person and one person alone.

If Mr Findlay had a shred of decency about him he would express his respect for the judicial system in Scotland and for the justice system in Scotland and leave the professional officers of our police service and our professional prosecutors to do their jobs, which is exactly what they have done.

**Russell Findlay:** That was the usual desperate deflection from John Swinney. He is trying to shut down scrutiny, and we will not stand for it.

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John Swinney says that the SNP is the victim, although there are new reports that taxpayers' money was also stolen. If the SNP is the victim, did it exercise its right in law to seek a review of the Crown Office's prosecution decision? Will John Swinney now follow the money, which bought a camper van, Montblanc pens and a home library? Is he taking legal action to force Peter Murrell to pay compensation or has John Swinney asked the Crown Office to use the proceeds of crime laws to recover luxury stolen goods from Peter Murrell and Nicola Sturgeon?

**The First Minister:** If there is anything desperate about all of this, it is the desperation of a man who has led the Conservative Party into oblivion asking me questions about this issue today. That is what Russell Findlay is doing. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Let the First Minister answer, please.

**The First Minister:** As a matter of fact, in court on Monday, the advocate depute made a verbal motion for confiscation in relation to section 92 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, and the decision on the matter will ultimately be for the court to make. Given that, as the Presiding Officer told us on Tuesday, the proceedings remain live until sentencing, I am unable to say any more beyond that.

The second point that I will make is in relation to the suggestion that there was public money involved in all of this. The only issue that could apply there is in relation to a policy development grant from the Electoral Commission. I want to reassure Parliament that, in order to receive funding, a party needs to apply to the Electoral Commission outlining the work that will be done in the forthcoming year, and to submit an audited report to the Electoral Commission outlining what grant funding has been spent on. It is only on receipt of the audited report that the final payment of the grant is made by the Electoral Commission. That confirms the point that I made to Parliament on Tuesday that it is SNP supporters' money that has been embezzled, and not public money.

The last thing that I will say to Russell Findlay is this: the Scottish National Party has been affected by the loss of the resources as a result of this case, but what the Scottish National Party can rely on now is the most effective arrangements being in place to guarantee that the resources that we use are used to maximum effect. We used them to maximum effect on 7 May, when the SNP won 58 seats in the Parliament and the Conservatives were reduced to a hopeless rump of 12, sitting over there. They may grin all they like, but, for the seventh time in a row in this Parliament, we successfully got rid of the Conservatives, and the people of Scotland can breathe a sigh of relief that the Conservatives are over there redundant as a consequence of the election.

## Ferry Services

**5. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh North Western) (LD):** During the Easter holidays, at least eight ferries were out of action at the same time. Every Scottish island faced disruption. Those communities are overdue serious compensation, and I hope that the First Minister will finally extend that to the coastal communities that are affected, too. Businesses there are now looking to the summer holidays and wondering what this situation will mean for them.

Last week, technology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to the rescue of passengers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the Waverley paddle steamer stepped in for a stricken Caledonian MacBrayne vessel. John Swinney must have winced with embarrassment at that reality.

Is Scotland's ferry fleet ready for the summer?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I acknowledge that there have been acute challenges in the ferry network over the past few weeks and months.

When I went to the Western Isles during the election campaign—and, by the way, I went there by ferry and came back by ferry; I did not just fly in for a day trip—I listened to people about the issues with ferries. I also confirmed that, if the Scottish National Party Government was re-elected, we would put in place financial assistance to deal with the damage that I acknowledge was undertaken to many communities as a consequence of the disruption during the Easter holidays. I am happy to confirm to Parliament that the Scottish Government will make such a fund available and we are now considering the terms and basis of that. I will reflect on Mr Cole-Hamilton's point about coastal communities.

As to whether the ferry network is equipped for the summer, when I looked at service strength this morning, before I came down to the chamber, I saw that ferry services on most routes are operating appropriately. That has been the case for a number of days. I look at that regularly, because I am keen to ensure that island communities are well served by the ferry network, and I will continue to do that, as will the transport secretary, who is also engaging on all of those questions.

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I do think that the ferry network is going to be ready for the summer. It will have to be, because the First Minister is going to be using it to go on his summer holidays.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I am grateful for that reply, but it is no wonder that the people of the Western Isles sent the First Minister and his party packing. Lots of coastal and island communities are turning away from the SNP because of this issue. Remember that *The New York Times* told its readers that, while our Scottish islands are beautiful,

“Good luck getting on or off.”

Scotland’s islands are a great option for a summer getaway—they are beautiful—but only if we can get holidaymakers over to their hotels and to cafes and distilleries.

The ferry fleet is more prone than ever before to breakdown and disruption. It is not resilient. Everyone who lives in those communities knows that all too well. Has the First Minister picked up the phone to ferry operators and Governments elsewhere in the United Kingdom and Europe to find extra vessels to keep those routes operational and our island communities profitable?

**The First Minister:** Of course we have done that. We have been using the MV Alfred on the Troon to Brodick route, with which the Presiding Officer may well be familiar. We have also purchased the Loch Frisa, which services the route from Oban to Craginure on the Isle of Mull. The MV Isle of Islay is also now in service, and it services the route to Islay. The Glen Sannox is servicing the Castlebay route presently, and we have another vessel coming from the Cemre yard in the summer, another one in the autumn and another in the spring. The Glen Rosa is also to join service. Therefore, there are more vessels coming into the fleet.

The SNP Government has already put nine new vessels into the fleet and we have 11 more coming into the fleet. I assure Mr Cole-Hamilton that CalMac and Northlink Ferries are always working to ensure that we have connections in place.

There is an important message that our islands are open for business. When I was in the Western Isles during the election campaign, I heard frustration from local businesses about the ferry network, but also about some of the amplification of these issues that indicated that it was ever more difficult for people to get to the islands, which is damaging to island communities.

Mr Cole-Hamilton said that island communities were turning their backs on the SNP. While I am on my feet, I cannot resist the temptation to respond. I grieve the loss of my dear friend Dr Alasdair Allan in the Western Isles. He was an absolutely outstanding parliamentarian, and I very much regret the fact that we were unable to hold on to Caithness, Sutherland and Ross, and Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch. However, after 75 years of Liberal representation, the people of Shetland did an absolutely wonderful thing. They sent Hannah Mary Goodlad here for the SNP, and we are delighted to welcome her to the Scottish Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** We now move to questions from back benchers. The leaders’ questions have taken some 30 minutes, so I think that folk will now appreciate why I have introduced a back benchers’ questions session on a Tuesday.

I ask members to ensure, please, that they have pressed their request-to-speak buttons, because a host of members are already keen to speak. Members have lodged very interesting questions that I am quite keen to take, but some of you have not pressed your buttons. Without further ado, I call Jackie Dunbar.

### **Energy Price Cap**

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** This week, it was announced that the energy price cap was going to increase by 13 per cent, which will lead to an estimated bill rise of £221. What assessment has been made of the impact that that will have on poverty and child poverty in Scotland?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The news about the energy price cap is a serious blow to families around the country, because, as we all heard during the election campaign, people are already wrestling with cost of living challenges. The 13 per cent increase in the energy price cap makes that situation ever more challenging for individuals and families.

The Scottish Government will take all the action that we can take, through measures that I set out during the election, relating to, for example, the affordability of travel and the food shop. However, what we need is action from the United Kingdom Government. It promised to reduce energy bills by £300, but energy bills are going to be higher than when Labour came to office. That is just another example of the failure of the Labour Government at Westminster.

There is now a strong and compelling argument for the motion that we will debate this afternoon, which is on the importance of ensuring that the energy-generating potential of Scotland is in Scotland’s hands, so that people can benefit from the strength of Scottish energy.

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### **Gillies Report (University of Aberdeen)**

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** The First Minister will remember the publication of the Gillies report last year, which contained recommendations about university governance and financial management, including on issues of transparency and staff engagement.

Today, Aberdeen university court is discussing restructuring, job cuts, increasing staff workload and more, yet staff have not been properly engaged, unions have not received the information that is required about fair work and other questions, and the university senate has not been properly consulted. What is the First Minister's view of how the Gillies recommendations are being understood and implemented by institutions, and the fact that public money is being used in ways that will have significant negative impacts on staff and students in Aberdeen and elsewhere? Will the First Minister agree to meet the campus unions as soon as possible?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The points that Maggie Chapman makes are very important, because the Gillies report found that there were significant issues. The report looked into issues at the University of Dundee, which were of an exceptional character. Nonetheless, the process that is being undertaken by the University of Aberdeen to ensure that it is able to sustain its activities must be carried out in line with the principles that the Government expects and that are contained in the Gillies report.

The University of Aberdeen operates as an arm's-length independent institution, so it is responsible for its own governance. However, ministers would expect the University of Aberdeen—and any university—to take due account of the issues that were set out in the Gillies review and the terms of the availability of funding through the Scottish Funding Council. I encourage the University of Aberdeen to engage constructively with all interested parties to ensure that that is the case.

The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education, Ben Macpherson, would be very happy to meet the trade unions. We will make arrangements for that to happen.

### **Renewables Industry (Jobs)**

**Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP):** This week, the Confederation of British Industry revealed that 105,000 renewables jobs are contributing more than £10 billion to the Scottish economy. Reform would end that industry tomorrow, and the Tories inflicted a tax on Scotland's energy that is costing 1,000 jobs per month. The First Minister knows that Scotland needs oil and gas supply chains and skills to deliver those renewables jobs, so what action is his Government taking to support our offshore industry and the renewables industry to drive forward Scotland's economy?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I thank Laura Mitchell for her question and welcome her to her place in Parliament as the member for Moray. I look forward to her contribution. The issues that she raises in relation to renewable energy and oil and gas are central to the economic interests of her constituency, and I know that she will champion them effectively in this Parliament.

I welcome the CBI report. With the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport, I had the opportunity to reflect at the CBI's annual Scottish lunch last Friday on the importance of a collaboration between Government, business, our renewable energy and oil and gas companies, our universities, our local authorities and other players in our economy.

When I opened the renewable energy engineering centre for Hitachi Energy UK yesterday in the city of Glasgow, I had the opportunity to reinforce the message on the importance of creating a sense of common purpose in our economy to ensure that we all take measures that support the oil and gas sector and renewables and ensure that we accelerate the transition to net zero.

We need to see practical measures taken to strengthen the financial viability of oil and gas activity, which comes through the removal of the energy profits levy, which is long overdue, and the acceleration of the steps to consenting around the grid, which is necessary for renewable energy developments. That will help to realise the ambitions that Laura Mitchell sets out, and I give her the assurance that the Scottish Government will argue for all those provisions.

**The Presiding Officer:** Back benchers have been very well behaved, with short, sharp questions. I would like shorter and sharper responses, to allow more members to come in.

### **Family C Learning Review Report**

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** The learning review into the case of family C in Glasgow has recently been published. The report on what was commonly known as the beastie house evidences the multitude of institutional failures that resulted in children enduring a decade of degrading, violent and sexual abuse at the hands of adults who were supposed to be caring for them. The heinous crimes that were

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committed are truly awful and heartbreaking. That that was able to happen in modern Scotland, where we have a multitude of children's policies and strategies that are supposed to protect children and recognise their rights, is a disgrace.

I recognise that the First Minister has given an apology to a scrum of journalists, but that is not equivalent to giving a statement to Parliament. What does he have to say to victims and to Parliament about those serious failings?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I am grateful to Claire Baker for raising this important issue. I agree with her conclusions and her assessment of the report. What has been disclosed is absolutely terrible reading.

I pay tribute at the outset to the children, who, from my reading of the report, have demonstrated extraordinary strength and tenacity in being able to convey the suffering that they have experienced. I express an unreserved apology to each of the children involved.

It is clear from my reading of the report that there were serious institutional failures in understanding and connecting all the information that was available. I find it difficult to comprehend how that could be the case, because the information was so obvious and so compelling, but it demonstrates an issue that has occurred in a number of cases on different occasions—the failure of institutions to make connections between information that comes together to therefore necessitate action and intervention. That is just one of the key points of learning that must come out of the report.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic will meet the City of Glasgow Council to consider the issue, which was discussed at Cabinet on Tuesday. I want to make sure that the lessons that are identified in the report are a source of challenge to all child protection committees in the country, because I agree fundamentally with Claire Baker's point that it is simply beyond comprehension that such experiences could take place in 21st century Scotland with the policy framework that we have in place. We have to honestly face up to the institutional failure that is involved, and I give her the commitment that the Government will do so.

### **Prison Population**

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** After the Government releasing more than 1,400 prisoners early, cutting the automatic early release point to less than a third of the sentence, bringing in a presumption against short sentences and all but stopping under-25s from going to prison, Scotland's prison population is, nevertheless, still at record levels. Does the First Minister accept that the knee-jerk, ham-fisted early release scheme has failed? Can he confirm that his Government will not bring forward yet another early release scheme to cover up its failure to tackle Scotland's prison capacity crisis?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Liam Kerr raises a serious issue. The prison population is at a very high level and the level of incarceration is very high. That is partly because of the success of the criminal justice authorities in prosecuting individuals for historical crimes and because of the length of sentences that have been applied. It gives rise to significant issues with prison capacity, which is being addressed directly. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and I met to discuss the issue yesterday. It will be the source of focused work among partners to ensure that we take all the action that is necessary, so that the prison population can be stabilised and our prisons can operate safely for all concerned.

### **Evacuation Support (Coalsnaughton)**

**Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** The First Minister may be aware that, so far, 60 families in my constituency have had to be evacuated at short notice from their homes due to underground movement in the former mining community of Coalsnaughton. The distress and uncertainty that have been caused for my constituents, including their children, cannot be overestimated.

Will the First Minister assure me that the national resilience framework and his Government will spare no effort in assisting my constituents? Will they ensure that the Mining Remediation Authority and the relevant insurance companies will fully and quickly discharge their responsibilities and provide serious support for my constituents as they experience the profound distress of being moved from their homes at short notice?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I am very concerned about the issue that Mr Brown raises. I am familiar with it and I provide him with the assurance that the Government's resilience network is actively supporting Clackmannanshire Council on the question. The Mining Remediation Authority is actively engaged with the partnership in taking forward the support that is required.

I acknowledge the distress, inconvenience and anxiety that the matter has caused to Mr Brown's constituents. I provide him with the assurance that the Government will do all that it can to support the residents concerned, as well as Clackmannanshire Council. If there are any specific areas on which Mr Brown

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requires assistance from the Government, he knows that we will respond swiftly to any request that he makes of us.

### **Recall of Members**

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform):** When John Swinney was voted in as First Minister last week, he said:

“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.”—[*Official Report*, 19 May 2026; c 33.]

The First Minister offered to work across party lines, because that is what people expect. My proposals to introduce a recall system were rejected in the previous session of the Parliament, which was a missed opportunity. The First Minister backs recall in principle. Will he agree to consider how we can best look at it again, either by me bringing my proposals back, by a committee being formed to look at the issue, or through some other option?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** As Mr Simpson indicates, in principle, I am in support of a recall provision, and I think that it is necessary for it to be in place. I am open to the mechanism by which that is undertaken. I genuinely consider this to be a rather invidious issue for the Government to bring forward, because it affects the status of members of Parliament. Therefore, I would rather see provisions emerge through parliamentary discussions, as opposed to the initiative of a Government bill, for example. It may be an issue that the corporate body wishes to provide advice about.

Essentially, I give Mr Simpson the assurance that the Government would be supportive of developing such a proposition, if we could agree on the most appropriate mechanism for doing that. I say that simply to respect the fact that I do not think that the Government should be passing judgment about the role of members of Parliament, as I do not think that that would be constitutionally appropriate. If Parliament wished us to consider it, I would be happy to do so.

### **The Vinery Banff**

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** A few weeks ago, the First Minister visited the Vinery in Banff with me and saw the difference that it makes through its offer of a welcome place where people can build confidence, learn new skills, improve wellbeing and sometimes find a route into work. With the loss of its United Kingdom shared prosperity funding, it now faces closure in a matter of days, which would be devastating for hundreds of local people and families. What steps can the First Minister take to engage with the centre and help to safeguard the services that it provides?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Karen Adam is absolutely right. I had a lovely visit with her to the Vinery in Banff and saw at first hand the tremendous positive impact that it has on the lives of individuals by tackling social isolation and helping individuals to overcome some of the mental wellbeing challenges that they are wrestling with.

I would be happy to explore with Ms Adam the steps that the Government could take to try to intervene. The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing would be able to engage on that issue, and we will explore what possibilities there are to safeguard the support that is available through the Vinery.

**The Presiding Officer:** With apologies to those members I was unable to take today, that concludes First Minister’s question time. I suspend the meeting until 2.30.

12:46

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## **Scotland’s Energy**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-00159, in the name of Stephen Gethins, entitled “It’s Scotland’s energy”. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

*The rest of this Official Report will be published progressively as soon as the text is available.*

14:30

**The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy (Stephen Gethins):** Deputy Presiding Officer, congratulations to you and your colleagues on your appointment. If you will permit me, before I get into the meat of the debate, I thank my predecessor in Dundee City East, Shona Robison, who was not only an outstanding minister, as I am sure the First Minister will agree, but a tireless advocate for Dundee. I know that she will be greatly missed in the Parliament. I also thank my predecessors in this portfolio, Gillian Martin, who is here with me today, and Angus Robertson, not only for their tireless work in the portfolios that I cover but—I am not embarrassed to say—for their guidance and valuable advice in my first days in the post.

I thank colleagues from across the Parliament for their good wishes. I want to say straight off that it is my aim—the First Minister said this about his role, too—to work in a collegiate fashion: to agree where we possibly can and to disagree rigorously. I am sure that there will be opportunities for disagreement, but we must do so agreeably when we cannot agree.

No party or MSP has a monopoly on wisdom—certainly not me—and I very much look forward to working with everybody in this chamber. I am so grateful for the good wishes that I have received from colleagues from other parties. I will not embarrass you, but it has been heartening, and I thank you.

Nobody will mind me saying that, most of all, I thank the people of Dundee City East for their faith in me. I also thank people in Dundee and Angus for the privilege of serving as their member of Parliament. I will miss the parts of the constituency that my colleagues Heather Anderson and Lloyd Melville are now fortunate enough to represent, but I am absolutely determined to get stuck in for Dundee.

Dundee is Scotland's "Yes city". It is a city that my family once migrated to from Ireland. It is a city that, like the rest of Scotland, is at its best because of its diversity and its outward-looking nature, which enriches our industries and our society. The city informs my politics, as I know that it does for other colleagues in the Parliament.

Dundee is a city that has been at the heart of Scotland's successes in food and drink, higher education, journalism and, of course, energy, which moves us to the fundamental point of today's debate.

We are debating where decisions should be made. Are they better being made here, in Scotland's Parliament, which is voted on by the people who live and work in Scotland, or at Westminster? Whatever our views, surely Scotland's energy policies should be in Scotland's hands. It is one of the most energy-rich countries in Europe, having won the natural lottery twice—once with hydrocarbons and then with its abundant renewables resources. Yet, despite that—

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Stephen Gethins:** Do you know what? I will take an intervention, despite this being my first speech—and who better to take one from than Murdo Fraser?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** I remind Mr Fraser that the convention is that there are no interventions on a first speech. However, the member has indicated that he is happy to take one.

**Murdo Fraser:** My apologies to you, Presiding Officer, and to the member. He was so confident in his approach that it had entirely slipped my mind that it was his first speech in this chamber.

I very much welcome Stephen Gethins to his place on the front bench as energy minister. I want to ask him about the renewable energy that he is talking about, which Scotland has benefited from and which is funded by subsidies that are currently paid for by 70 million people across the United Kingdom. If he dismantles the UK energy market, as he proposes, will that not mean that those subsidies will need to be paid for by the 5.5 million people living in Scotland? What would that do for bills that are being paid by consumers here?

**Stephen Gethins:** I have great respect for the member, and I thank him for both his intervention and his welcome. I urge him patience. I merely say this: Scotland is a massive exporter of energy; other markets rely on our energy and have done so for decades.

I am sorry to say so, but that speaks to the isolationist approach that has been taken by the Conservative Party, which turned its back on a Europe that is coming together on energy security. Isolationism is not a policy that our party—or a majority in this Parliament—will endorse. I will come on to that point.

In energy-rich Scotland, we are facing increasing energy bills. Just yesterday, the Labour Government, which had promised to reduce energy bills, put them up. We are a country that produces more energy than it consumes.

Mr Fraser will be delighted by this: for context, our oil and gas industry has sent £400 billion to the Treasury over decades, with very little in return and no long-term planning. Can members imagine that? We have a

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finite resource, but there is no long-term planning. We are one of the few countries on earth never to have put together a future generations fund. That is why Westminster has failed and why this place deserves to have full control over energy.

Renewables alone deliver 20.8 terawatt hours outside of Scotland annually. To put it into context, that net export is worth £1.7 billion and, if we kept the energy in Scotland, it would be enough to power every home in Scotland for three and a half years. That shows the value that it has to the rest of the UK and the whole of Europe when it comes to energy security.

Lower bills where that energy is produced should be part of the solution, but we have been let down. That is why decisions about energy should be made here. Westminster's track record, be it under the Conservatives—or those former Conservatives—or under Labour, means that it no longer deserves to keep that control.

The disconnect between Scotland's energy wealth and the daily reality that households face is not inevitable. We all talk—I have heard some fantastic speeches—about the conversations that have taken place over the past few weeks. It is a consequence of a constitutional arrangement that leaves decisions about Scotland's energy in the hands of Westminster, which is delivering, in this energy-rich part of Europe, energy bills that are among the highest anywhere in Europe. That should be a challenge for all of us in this chamber.

The people of Scotland returned a Government with a clear instruction: deliver the benefits of Scotland's energy wealth to Scottish households, communities and businesses. The First Minister set out that position and the electorate endorsed it.

Let us look more deeply into that. I am sure that members will all recall the polling evidence that came out last month during the election campaign. An Ipsos survey showed that more than three quarters of Scots think that there should be more devolution over energy, and that only 14 per cent think that it should remain under Westminster control, which would be the case under Labour, Reform and Conservative policies.

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Will the minister give way?

**Stephen Gethins:** I will give way for a second time, because I have great respect for the member.

**Michael Marra:** I, too, welcome the minister to his position. I consider him a friend and am delighted to see him in his place.

The minister spent the election campaign talking about how independence could deliver taking a third off energy bills in Scotland. Can he tell us how?

**Stephen Gethins:** I have great respect for the member, and I thank him for his kind words. He is an advocate for the north-east and for Dundee. However, he must understand that, as we sit here exporting electricity while the Treasury in London benefits from it, we could introduce measures such as a social contract or a social tariff to help lower bills for those most in need. That is only one of the things that could be done.

The benefit is not only to Scotland's citizens. I will talk about the rest of my brief. Scotland is a responsible and outward-looking member of the European family of nations. Yesterday, my first meeting as part of my external affairs brief was with the Ukrainian consul general. Back in January, I sat in a bunker for two nights as the Russians bombarded Ukraine's energy infrastructure. In a more dangerous world, Europe needs to move closer together. Parties that have turned their back on Europe ignore that at their—and our—peril. We are rich, and we should be thriving. We are part of Europe's solution to the energy crisis.

Other members will be glad to hear that I saw that for myself in Aberdeen, on my first ministerial visit on Monday. I am grateful to colleagues from across the sector for meeting me. Those businesses matter. Yesterday's Confederation of British Industry report showed that net zero-related industries are worth more than £10 billion, that they account for 5 per cent of Scotland's total economic output and that they provide jobs for more than 100,000 people, as the member for Moray raised at First Minister's question time. Those opportunities, which exist onshore and offshore, are set to grow.

That could be game changing for Scotland, with around £100 billion of global capital expenditure coming down the track. Westminster is holding back that huge potential, not least through the punitive transmission charging charges that it has set, which business cited to me.

The Scottish Government is doing everything that it can within its limited powers. We have provided £150 million of investment, which will attract wider investment and create a funding stack of almost £900 million-worth of projects across Scotland.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

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**Stephen Gethins:** I want to make some progress. I am not sure that I got a particularly good response from Mr Fraser.

High energy bills might not matter to the Conservative Party, but they matter to the people of Scotland. Labour came into government promising that bills would be £300 lower, but yesterday another eye-watering increase was announced that will mean that they will be £300 higher. That is not good enough. The future lies in providing clean, sustainable and secure power, strengthening affordability, resilience and competitiveness, and protecting Scottish people and businesses from our energy bills being dictated by international events.

Within the limited powers that we have, we are already reforming the energy consents process to enable us to bring forward more low-cost renewable energy. During the parliamentary session, we will establish a ScotWind health fund. We will also establish a future generations fund for the oil and gas sector, which Labour and the Conservatives failed to establish. We will encourage more community ownership—we are already delivering £15 million for that. We will deliver on the £500 million just transition fund, as well as supporting the Acorn carbon capture and storage project for the north-east. Do the Tory members remember carbon capture and storage?

More immediately, we want updated guidance to be provided to public bodies on community use of public land and an assessment to be undertaken of the potential for installing solar panels in underused spaces. That cannot be done within the current devolution process to enable us to meet our full potential.

That leads me on to oil and gas. Few industries know the price of Westminster failure better than our oil and gas sector. North Sea oil and gas plays a vital role in Scotland's energy system and security mix. That excellent workforce in the north-east has been let down by our wealth being squandered by successive Westminster Governments. There is no future generations fund. Let us look next door at Norway. It has a sovereign wealth fund that is worth £1.6 trillion, which is six times Scotland's gross domestic product. Just think what we could have done with that.

The North Sea is a mature and declining basin, so it is vital that we have a parallel-track approach to the transition, with oil and gas production being managed alongside the increasing deployment of renewables. However, the transition is being put at risk by the current energy profits levy, which is accelerating the decline of North Sea oil and gas while failing to give the support that is needed to renewables to ensure a just transition. The approach that is taken must be fair for the North Sea. That is why, I am afraid, we cannot back the Greens' amendment. As the First Minister said earlier today, that approach must be evidence led and determined on a case-by-case basis, with climate compatibility and energy security tests being met. When I was in Aberdeen, I heard about the need for a joined-up approach.

I was glad that, on his first ministerial visit, Stephen Flynn went to Grangemouth, which has been so badly let down by Westminster. Climate action and a just transition to net zero will bring benefits across Scotland. We will support the creation of 500 additional jobs in the Grangemouth industrial cluster and, at the same time, we will invest £9 million in support for workers at Mossmorran.

Let me turn to the idea of community benefit. We must reject the Liberal Democrat amendment, because it knocks out the idea of devolving those powers, which the Liberal Democrats were once in favour of. I have great respect for the member for Orkney, Liam McArthur, and look forward to working with him on how we can expand the work that has already been done. However, let us not forget that, last year alone, community benefits delivered £30 million to our communities.

In conclusion—I think that I am reaching my conclusion—a more energy-secure Scotland will see us building renewable energy generation that will lower bills, protect us from international shocks and secure good jobs for those who are currently employed in our offshore sector and who bring so much to our economy.

Scotland has the energy; it does not yet have the power. Our vast resources are among the best in Europe, but the people are not feeling the benefit. Westminster has had its chance and has failed. Today, I am asking members to empower this Parliament to be part of the solution for energy security across Europe and to be part of the solution locally, nationally, internationally and—vitality—in people's homes.

I ask colleagues to back our motion today, and I move,

That the Parliament believes that Scotland's energy should be in Scotland's hands, and calls for all energy powers to be immediately devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** I call Daniel Johnson to speak to and move amendment S7M-00159.2.

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14:46

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I congratulate you, Deputy Presiding Officer, and welcome you to your position.

I begin on a friendly note by welcoming Stephen Gethins to his position. I have known him for a number of years and hope that I will not embarrass him by observing that we first met when we were student politicians. Let us hope that we have raised the standard of debate a little since then. Indeed, I wonder whether this Government will become a tale of two Stephens. We can see why the First Minister appointed Stephen Gethins, because he brings a mature approach and can be collegiate and work on a cross-party basis. I will let others decide what the analysis of the other Stephen might be.

It is important to talk about energy and we need to have a grown-up and rational conversation, because energy is at the heart of our economy and of this country's future prosperity, but the motion does not auger well. "It's Scotland's Energy" might make for a somewhat adequate T-shirt slogan, but it is an incoherent title for a parliamentary motion and an entirely empty basis for policy. I gently point out to Mr Gethins that his speech was rather heavy on rhetoric but rather light on actual analysis.

The reality is that we have seen a huge investment of £150 billion in renewables in Scotland since 2014. Of the 45GW of renewables capacity in this country, 25 per cent is in Scotland, with 80 per cent of the UK's wind generation capacity being in Scotland. That is because of UK policy—driven by contracts for difference and by renewables obligations before that—which has driven investment and lowered costs by those bills being underwritten through strike prices. That has cost the average UK bill payer £39 annually. Is the Scottish National Party saying that that £39 should be spread only across UK bill payers? That would surely be worth hundreds of pounds per person, per year.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray):** Mr Johnson made a rather pejorative point about the difference between rhetoric and action. I am reminded of promises made by the Labour Party in the run-up to the 2024 general election. It promised to reduce bills by up to £300 but, in fact, prices have risen by £300. Can he explain why we are seeing such a rise when other countries across Europe are investing in lowering fuel duty and bills for residents who are suffering from issues caused by the invasion of Iran? Why is the UK Government not taking the action that is being taken by those in other countries?

**Daniel Johnson:** The cabinet secretary seems to be enjoying the new rules about interventions. Is he not aware that there have been some major changes in international circumstances? Average bills had been going down, especially for those on direct debits. Most critically, if he is talking about the lowest cost, I would ask him where in Europe has the lowest electricity cost. It is France, 80 per cent of whose generation comes from nuclear. If we are going to have a serious argument on energy costs, let us have it, but let us have it on the basis of facts, not assertion and dogma, which is what we have from the SNP Scottish Government.

The reality is that, if the SNP is going to assert that independence would lower bills by a third, it needs to explain how that would happen. Where is the excess? Right now, electricity bills are underwritten by taxpayers to the tune of £39 annually. What would happen to contracts for difference under an independent regime or a devolved one? Is the SNP saying that Scottish bill payers would pick up that underwriting? The reality is that the strike price has been above the wholesale electricity price, not below it. The SNP needs to answer those questions if it wants a serious debate on the matter.

We need a serious debate, because there are a number of areas within devolved competence on which we should be seeking to go further and faster. Why has the Scottish Government not been progressing quickly and successfully on upgrades? Consumer Scotland expects the schemes in Scotland to reach just 45 per cent of fuel-poor households, but the figure in England has been 95 per cent.

On transmission and infrastructure charging and upgrades, we have failed to see the support for the planning regime that we need to accelerate progress. The reality is that it takes seven to 10 years for renewables projects to get through the planning system in Scotland. Comparable projects in countries such as Norway take three to four years. Where has been the progress on heat networks? Where is the SNP's promised publicly owned power company? Those are just some of the many questions on matters that are within devolved competence that we need to examine, and we need a debate on them.

It is all well and good to talk about renewables, but we have failed to have a public debate and discourse about what they mean in relation to infrastructure. That is why we now see renewables being used as a political football. We need a candid discussion because, if we are going to have renewables generation, we will require the infrastructure to distribute that power—not least to the rest of the UK, to which we want to sell that electricity. That infrastructure is underwritten and paid for across the United Kingdom.

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Those are some of the things that we need to talk about. By all means, let us have a candid and mature debate about the future of our energy economy, but I do not believe that the motion or the Government's proposals are anything more than sloganeering and rhetoric from the SNP.

I move amendment S7M-00159.2, to leave out from second "that" to end and insert:

"Scotland needs a managed and just transition that relies on an integrated UK energy market, balancing the continuing role of oil and gas alongside the maturity of the North Sea activity and Scotland's climate targets, and supports the examination of all energy technologies, including nuclear, to achieve a sustainable energy mix."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** I remind members that the convention is that there should be no interventions during a first speech.

14:52

**Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform):** I welcome everyone to their new roles, including the ministers and shadow ministers.

I am delighted to rise to give my first speech. I believe that this Parliament and this Government need massive change, so I am encouraged by some of the talk of change that we have heard so far, especially the contributions from the Presiding Officer and his deputies. However, I remain concerned that real change will remain elusive and that this Parliament and, especially, this continuity Government remain out of touch, wholly self-satisfied and in a Marie Antoinette-like bubble. Nowhere is that more apparent than on energy policy. Energy reality simply does not seem to get past the outer walls here.

Scotland, the UK and, indeed, much of Europe face the simple reality that our energy system is not working. We have a fragile and overstretched grid that is struggling to deal with intermittent renewables, unable to cope with growth opportunities such as those from artificial intelligence and, increasingly, at risk of failure. We have a growing reliance on imported energy, particularly via French interconnectors and liquefied natural gas tankers, and we are destroying our own oil and gas industry, despite needing oil and gas for decades.

However, the main area of failure is the cost of our new energy system. We are facing an energy price crisis. Extremely high prices are hurting consumers and, perhaps most obviously, we have the highest industrial energy prices in the world, which are driving deindustrialisation. The damage from that is clear to see. Our primary steel industry across Scotland and the UK has nearly been lost. Industries including chemicals, pharmaceuticals and ceramics have all been hammered.

Across the board, manufacturing is at a huge disadvantage due to high costs. That is more obvious in Scotland, with the closures of the Grangemouth refinery, the Mossmorran plant and the Alexander Dennis bus factory in Falkirk.

Those problems are not caused by temporary gas price spikes; they are caused by net zero policies, particularly the overuse of expensive and intermittent renewables in the system—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** I remind members that there should be no interruptions during first speeches. I appreciate that the minister took interventions, but there should still be no interruptions.

**Duncan Massey:** Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer.

As Professor Dieter Helm of the University of Oxford succinctly put it, renewables are "not cheap, not home-grown and not secure".

That is where we are.

The costs are being driven by two things. First, the direct costs of renewables are very high. We can see that clearly through CFD prices at the moment. The subsidies are paid by the UK Government, on which Scottish wind is wholly dependent.

For example, in allocation round 7—the most recent funding round of CFD—offshore wind is priced at £95 per megawatt hour and floating wind is priced at £215 per megawatt hour. On some of our older wind farms, such as Beatrice, it is priced at well over £200 per megawatt hour. The prices are all index linked and on long-term contracts, so the prices are fixed to go up for nearly 20 years. We can compare that with the direct cost of gas, which is between £50 and £60 per megawatt hour.

Secondly, the system costs that are imposed by renewables are even higher, and they continue to grow. They are like the submerged part of an iceberg, making up two thirds of the cost of our bills. The reason for that is that, to support intermittent generation, we have to build a vastly larger grid—much greater than that of a conventional system—at huge expense. There is also a huge amount of ire and anger from those in our rural communities, who do not want giant pylons or battery farms across their back gardens.

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We also need to maintain 100 per cent back-up. In Scotland and the UK, the back-up comes from gas; in other European countries, it comes from coal. That adds huge cost, complexity and vulnerability. Vulnerability is an increasingly serious concern, with the risks of blackouts rising, as demonstrated by what happened in Spain last summer.

Scotland is going to be especially exposed to those risks. We rely on only two ageing conventional plants—Torness nuclear plant and Peterhead gas plant—and both could close in the early 2030s, which would make Scotland extremely vulnerable to blackouts and likely to be dependent on gas plants that are located in the north of England.

We have to start facing that energy reality. Renewables will definitely be part of the energy mix, but we have to recognise the high costs and limitations of them.

That brings me to our oil and gas sector—a world-leading industry that is being crushed by deliberate policy choices. Despite the massive investment in renewables, the oil and gas industry remains essential. In the UK, 75 per cent of primary energy still comes from oil and gas. Globally, 81 per cent of primary energy comes from oil and gas. We need to acknowledge that, in all scenarios, the UK and Scotland will need oil and gas for decades. It is needed for transport fuels and key chemicals—just about every product in this room requires oil and gas—and it is vital for heating and industrial processes. Paradoxically, the more renewables that we add to the grid, the more flexible gas back-up we need.

We need to maximise our use of oil and gas resources rather than import them from neighbouring Norway or from countries even further afield. We can do that. The North Sea has a strong and vital future, if we choose it. We need to urgently remove the energy profits levy. We need unambiguous support for the Jackdaw and Rosebank oil fields and all new projects. We need unambiguous support for new licences in drilling. That would revitalise our industry.

As my amendment states, I call on the Parliament to be a vocal champion for the North Sea oil and gas industry, to apologise for previous policies that show lack of support for the industry—including the presumption against new development—and to provide unambiguous support for Jackdaw and Rosebank and new drilling, with new planning laws needed if necessary.

The benefits of a stronger UK oil and gas industry are enormous: continued jobs, major tax revenue, greater balance of payments and greater energy security, with, in particular, the opportunity to reduce imports, including greatly reducing or even ending LNG imports.

Let us talk about emissions. UK emissions now account for less than 0.8 per cent of global emissions. Scotland accounts for about 10 per cent of that, at 0.08 per cent—not even a rounding error—and that figure is just going to keep getting smaller and smaller, as large nations such as India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Nigeria continue to use more energy, especially from gas and coal. The UK is still about the 24th largest oil producer in the world, but it accounts for only about 0.7 per cent of world production—another rounding error in global terms.

Furthermore, the Parliament should note that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has quietly removed its RCP—representative concentration pathway—8.5 scenario, once again highlighting that the scientific consensus is that there is not an emergency but a slow, mild warming. It is a problem, for sure, but not something that requires us to commit unilateral economic suicide and decimate every industry in this country.

That brings me to another industry that this Government has tried to destroy—nuclear. Nuclear energy is emission free, 24/7 and reliable, and every industrial country around the world is now moving towards it. It is increasingly seen as vital for new technologies such as data centres, artificial intelligence and robotics. Scotland used to be an absolute world leader in nuclear. We had four large plants across the country, cutting-edge research at Rolls-Royce in East Kilbride and at Dounreay, and world-leading nuclear vessel operations at Faslane. We need to rediscover that, because the world has turned. We need to reindustrialise, because 24/7, cheap, reliable and localised energy is needed for new technologies such as AI, and Scotland needs to be part of that.

It is simple. If we want real economic growth, we need a pragmatic energy policy that focuses on cheap, abundant and reliable energy. We need energy policy that is driven by reality, not wishful thinking, and it must acknowledge that our current failing system has the highest industrial energy costs in the world. We need energy policy that is backed by the broad shoulders of the UK Government. That means maximising our oil and gas resources in the short and medium terms and transitioning to a nuclear-powered system over the long term, with renewables playing a complementary role rather than a dominant one. That is how we will secure cheap energy for everyone and ensure that we can reindustrialise, protect our world-leading oil and gas industry and keep the lights on for Scotland's future.

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I move amendment S7M-00159.1, to leave out from second “that” to end and insert:

“Scotland’s current net zero-driven energy policies are failing, contributing to deindustrialisation through high energy costs and also increasing grid instability, including with the planned closure of Torness nuclear power station, thus creating a significant risk of blackouts; recognises the continued dependence of renewables on UK Government subsidies; acknowledges Scotland’s past leadership in nuclear power; calls for renewed investment in nuclear capacity, further calls on the Scottish Government to recognise the ongoing importance of oil and gas and to fully support the sector in the North Sea, including through unambiguous support for the Jackdaw and Rosebank oil fields and new drilling and licences; calls on the Scottish Government to apologise for its previous lack of support of the industry, including for what it considers has been the presumption against new developments, and considers that, in light of the challenges facing the sector, that energy powers should remain reserved to the UK Government.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** I call Lorna Slater to speak to and move amendment S7M-00159.3.

15:03

**Lorna Slater (Edinburgh Central) (Green):** For a change of tone, the Scottish Greens believe that Scotland’s energy should be put in Scotland’s hands. We have long called for more powers for Scotland, as well as Scottish independence. Scotland urgently needs to respond to the climate emergency, cut the cost of living and ensure our long-term sustainable energy security. It might come as a shock to my colleague, but oil and gas are a finite resource. They are not abundant—it is a declining basin. Every litre of oil and gas that is pulled out of that basin costs more than the litre before, and that is even if we expand investment in oil and gas. It is a declining industry. The cost of energy in Scotland is a challenge.

**Liam Kerr:** The member does not, however, address the fact that demand is continuing to rise and is not going anywhere. Where do we source the gas and oil to meet the demand?

**Lorna Slater:** We need to manage that demand. The Scottish Government should have kept its commitment to reduce traffic kilometres by 20 per cent. It should have introduced the heat in buildings bill, which would have reduced energy demand to heat our homes. We can reduce the demand by changing how we use energy. The main problem for our energy in the UK, and for our costs here, is the way that the UK Government links energy, electricity and gas prices, which prevents bill payers from benefiting from the low generating cost of renewable energy. That urgently needs to change to allow for cheap renewable energy that would boost industry and accelerate the decarbonisation of heat and transport.

**Duncan Massey:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Lorna Slater:** I am going to make some progress, thank you.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** It is a matter for the member whether she chooses to take an intervention.

**Lorna Slater:** In the previous session of Parliament, the Economy and Fair Work Committee heard over and over again that the cost of energy is the main concern for business and industry. Next winter, the cost of gas and oil to heat homes will be nearly everyone’s main concern. We cannot remain tied to the rollercoaster of fossil fuel prices. We need to produce our own clean, sustainable and affordable energy from renewable sources.

**Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Lorna Slater:** I will take some more interventions in a minute. Let me make progress.

Throwing good money after bad to try to expand North Sea oil and gas drilling just adds carbon to the atmosphere that we have to remove later on, at great expense, or else it will drive up global temperatures, with disastrous consequences for future generations. The world has far more fossil fuel than it can safely burn, and issuing licences to extract fossil fuels from new sources is indefensible.

I congratulate Reform colleagues on finally managing to lodge an amendment to a debate—the third time is the charm—but I am alarmed by the flat-out climate denial and, indeed, reality denial that is contained in the amendment.

**Duncan Massey:** I will make two points, if I may. The first is that, last year, the UK paid £2.64 billion in CFD subsidies. That is the difference between the market price, which is driven by the expensive gas that the member talks about, and the CFD strike price. That is the reality of it. CFDs are £2.6 billion more expensive.

On her last point, does Lorna Slater acknowledge that the terms “climate emergency” and “climate crisis” are faith-based terms and are not actually supported by the scientific consensus or, indeed, by the IPCC, which is the correct technical authority?

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**Lorna Slater:** I absolutely disagree with Duncan Massey, of course. The climate emergency is backed by climate science globally. To condemn future generations to the future that exists if global warming gets to 3.5°C or 4°C is a horrendous thing to do.

The member does not include in his calculations the cost of re-sequestering the carbon that is emitted. We have been letting the fossil fuel industry off scot free, because we let it pollute our atmosphere and raise carbon emissions, and then we sit in the chamber thinking, “Goodness, how are we going to put in place CCS and other ways to resequenter that carbon?” Public money is trying to clean up the pollution that has been generated by private capital.

**Stephen Kerr:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Lorna Slater:** No—I need to continue. Sorry.

Just so that we are clear, around £17.5 billion a year is spent in the UK on fossil fuel subsidies on an oil and gas industry that is fully established, unlike renewables, which is still a developing industry. That does not count tax breaks, which are a form of subsidy.

Previous analysis from Global Justice Now revealed that, in 2024 alone, the UK saw fossil fuel companies BP and Shell, which are among those that benefit from all that public support, make a combined total of £26.2 billion in profits. That is more than double the combined total of cuts made to the aid and welfare budgets in 2025. The head of BP in the UK has a base salary of £1.6 million, and her total compensation this year is expected to exceed £11.7 million. The UK handing more public money and tax breaks to those stinking rich polluters, instead of investing in moving us to clean energy that is locally generated from our abundant renewable resources, is unconscionable.

In Scotland, anyway, our energy transition is under way, with excellent progress on moving to renewable electricity generation. We now have the harder challenges of changing how we travel, how we manage our land and how we heat our homes. That is exactly where the SNP Government needs to set out its stall and say how it would meet Scotland’s energy needs if it had the powers.

**Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Lorna Slater:** Let me finish this thought.

Spoilers—Rosebank et al are not climate compatible, so we need a plan. We cannot wait to find out that they are not climate compatible—they are not climate compatible. Will the Scottish Government transition using the strategy that is defined in its own draft energy strategy, or will it continue to sit on the fence?

I will take the intervention.

**Helen McDade:** I appreciate that. Does Lorna Slater accept that there are children in Scotland who are living in cold homes because of the price of energy? Does she also accept that the contracts for difference subsidy of £2.64 billion that Duncan Massey referred to has played its part in causing our energy prices, which are four times those of the US?

**Lorna Slater:** I agree with the member that families are suffering in cold homes in Scotland, which is why we need the heat in buildings bill to ensure that everyone in Scotland has a warm, affordable home. I disagree with the point about contracts for difference, because it is important to invest in renewable energy as it becomes an established industry. It is distressing that the oil and gas industry, which is already an established industry, is still raking in public money, subsidies and tax breaks—it has not needed those for years, because it makes billions in profits. As we move to renewable energy, it makes sense, of course, that we support growing industries. That is how a just transition works.

**Stephen Kerr:** Will the member give way now?

**Lorna Slater:** Certainly.

**Stephen Kerr:** Ms Slater mentioned the evidence that was heard by the Economy and Fair Work Committee. I hope that she would agree that the tone of that evidence was that we are causing the deindustrialisation of Scotland through the imposition of levies and other market interventions on businesses. Hence, businesses are shutting down in Scotland and are offshoring to other parts of the world. We are defeating our own purposes by pursuing the policy prescription that Lorna Slater puts before the Parliament this afternoon.

**Lorna Slater:** The member makes a few mixed points. He was a member of the committee, and I heard in evidence put before it that businesses are struggling with the costs of energy. Everyone is particularly worried about the spikes in fossil fuel prices because of geopolitical events. We need to move away from that

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rollercoaster and back to the sustainable energy that we generate in Scotland, which means renewable energy for the long term.

**Stephen Kerr:** Would the member give way again?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** I advise the member that she does not have time to take any more interventions.

**Lorna Slater:** A new report commissioned by the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit states that net zero industries contribute £10.2 billion in gross value added to the Scottish economy and support more than 150,000 jobs. An estimated 3,000 businesses are now part of the Scottish net zero economy, with 90 per cent being small or medium-sized businesses.

The Scottish Greens want Scotland to lead a renewables revolution, with £600 million of investment in onshore and offshore wind, tidal and solar, including redeploying millions in public funding that has been pledged to unproven greenwashing carbon capture and storage technologies. The Government needs to bring back the heat in buildings bill to decarbonise Scotland's homes and buildings by 2045. With our abundant renewable resources, energy should be cheap in Scotland but, while Westminster holds the power, we cannot make that happen. It is time that we did.

I move amendment S7M-00159.3, to insert at end:

"in order that Scotland can respond to the climate emergency, cut the cost of living and contribute to energy security; recognises that the climate emergency is an urgent priority for Scotland and for the world, and that the re-emergence of climate denial poses a serious threat; accepts that the world has far more fossil fuel than it can afford to burn without disastrous consequences, and considers that issuing licences to extract fossil fuel from new sources would therefore be indefensible; recognises that the way in which the UK Government links electricity and gas prices prevents billpayers from benefiting from the low generating cost of renewable electricity, and that changing this system would accelerate the decarbonisation of heat and transport; believes that putting Scotland's energy in Scotland's hands must include a significant increase in community-owned energy, and further believes that reducing the cost of energy and achieving a rapid and just transition away from fossil fuels will deliver jobs, investment and a strong economy, particularly in rural and island communities."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** I call Liam Kerr to speak to and move amendment S7M-00159.4.

15:12

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** I congratulate Stephen Gethins on his appointment as energy minister and I commiserate with him for having to prosecute such an evidentially lacking and, indeed, threadbare motion. Listening to the debate exposes the perils of reducing nuanced, data-driven policy areas to the narrow nationalist rhetoric of the SNP. The consequences of what the motion calls for would be calamitous, whether that is in regard to energy generation, household bills, the economy or, indeed, the environment.

For example, the Government demands control over renewables generation and continues to bank on intermittent and variable wind power, but it fails to mention that it already has power over, for example, seabed rights for offshore wind projects yet its handling of the ScotWind licences was so botched that, last November, Shell handed back the CampionWind lease, having spent 18 months trying and failing to sell it. In February, Audit Scotland launched a formal investigation into the ScotWind leasing round.

The Government also fails to mention that, without the UK's contracts for difference regime providing crucial stability for high upfront cost projects, it is unlikely that any of Scotland's 3GW of operational offshore wind would have been built, let alone the fact that the ScotWind projects would not even have got off the ground. Then, there are the constraint payments, which in 2025 totalled somewhere between £340 million and £380 million.

It is deeply irresponsible for the minister to propose the motion without addressing issues such as replication of the CFD regime, ways of meeting those constraint payments or the funding of the transmission and storage updates that are required to integrate Scottish offshore wind, which it is estimated will cost up to £20 billion by 2030.

**Stephen Gethins:** Does the member think that the £400 billion that has gone to Westminster has been well spent, given that no resource has been given back and no future generations fund has been established? What does he make of the constraint payments that are holding back renewables, an issue that, even in my first week in post, industry has been raising with me persistently? Westminster has failed—does he not agree?

**Liam Kerr:** I fundamentally disagree. We only need to go and look at the current infrastructure that is out there. That is what the money has bought, because, thankfully, we are part of a wholly integrated United

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Kingdom. To suggest otherwise is deeply irresponsible, and that irresponsibility is most stark in the Government's position on oil and gas, to which my amendment principally speaks.

The SNP motion says that the Scottish Government wants control over North Sea oil and gas, yet it quietly ignores the Scottish Government's January 2023 energy strategy, which states that the Government has "a presumption against new exploration for oil and gas."

In other words, while oil and gas remains reserved, a Conservative Government could—and would—reverse Labour's economically, strategically and environmentally disastrous ban on new exploration and production. However, if the SNP got control, its energy strategy makes it clear that it would shut the North Sea. The worst of it is that current domestic production from the North Sea meets around 40 per cent of UK gas demand, and nearly half is brought in from Norway, which is drilling the same basin. In fact, while Labour and the SNP are trying to shut the North Sea and lose taxes and jobs, Norway licensed 70 new blocks in early 2026 and gave companies major tax incentives. We must not let decisions on North Sea energy fall into the SNP's hands.

On the renewables intermittency problem, the minister utterly fails to address questions of baseload. Torness, Scotland's last nuclear station, which generated around 17 per cent of Scotland's electricity in 2024, will shortly be closed. However, this Government has used the powers that it already has to block any new nuclear in Scotland—a decision that this Parliament has heard time and again in recent years is based on misinformation, prejudice and blind ideology.

Finally, it is important that I address the issue of high energy bills, which the minister is right to say are a real challenge and a cause of fear for people. The minister tries to suggest that getting energy powers would reduce those bills, but people need to hear the truth. For example, the way to reduce the constraint payments that are paid when wind farms generate excess power that cannot be transmitted or stored efficiently is through major investment in transmission and storage infrastructure, which would largely be funded through network charges on household gas and electricity bills, which would add around £108 a year to the average household bill. Perhaps, in closing, the Government will address how it would fund those network and storage upgrades were it ever to receive those powers, particularly in the context of the £5 billion black hole legacy left by the previous SNP Government.

I note that the minister is not levelling with people that Scotland's bills have virtually nothing to do with licensing powers and everything to do with terrain, population density, climate, housing stock, rurality and the transmission and grid upgrades.

Of course, one solution to high bills that is entirely within the Government's existing powers would have been to use ScotWind revenues to reduce bills, invest in infrastructure or create a sovereign wealth fund. However, the finance secretary's predecessor, Shona Robison, chose not to do that and instead used that money to plug her own funding gaps in the Scottish budget.

**Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To go back to the issue of constraint payments, the member will realise that one of the reasons that constraint payments are paid is that the nuclear sector is pumping baseload on to the grid and cannot actually be turned off. Further, I point out that new nuclear will cost about £50 billion—that is the estimated cost of Hinkley Point C. How are £50-billion nuclear power stations going to bring down energy bills?

**Liam Kerr:** I am afraid that the deep ignorance of the SNP's nuclear policy is exemplified in that intervention. Nobody is proposing to build Hinkley C in Scotland; what we are looking at is small modular reactors—

**Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP):** They do not exist.

**Liam Kerr:** They absolutely could be—and, indeed, are being—built.

What Scotland needs is informed, long-term strategic planning. We need a strategy that not only recognises the importance of oil and gas jobs, energy security, the environment, the economy and skills, but acknowledges the need for new nuclear baseload. The strategy must do so alongside and in partnership with a balanced, managed transition to renewables, and it should detail a serious long-term plan for storage and transmission to genuinely reduce people's bills. Scotland does not need more ill-informed, superficial posturing from an SNP that is obsessed with grievance and manufactured divisions. That is why the SNP motion should be rejected and the Conservative amendment whole-heartedly supported.

I move amendment S7M-00159.4, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"recognises the need for bold and ambitious reform in Scotland following the Scottish General Election; acknowledges that the majority of people in Scotland want the Scottish Government to focus on the issues that impact their day-to-day lives; considers that the priority of the Scottish Government should therefore be to improve the NHS and public services, make life more affordable, support communities and high streets, grow a fair and prosperous economy, which tackles inequality, and

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ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed; believes that this ambitious future can and should be achieved through the devolved powers of the Parliament and rejects any attempt by the Scottish Government to delay this work by dedicating resources towards returning to divisive arguments of the past.”

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