

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 15 May 2003
(*Afternoon*)

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 15 May 2003

(Afternoon)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The first item of business today is consideration of motion S2M-33, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out today's business, which is the selection of the Parliament's nominee for First Minister.

I remind members that if the motion is agreed to, nominations for the election will close and that under rule 4.1.3 of the standing orders a period of 30 minutes must elapse between the closure of nominations and the commencement of the voting period for the selection of the nominee.

I ask any member who wishes to speak against the motion to press their request-to-speak button now.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

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2:30 pm	Selection of the Parliament's nominee for First Minister.—[Patricia Ferguson.]
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Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I declare that the period for nominations is now closed. I suspend the meeting for 30 minutes until 2.32 pm.

14:02

Meeting suspended until 14:32.

14:32

On resuming—

First Minister

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is the selection of the Parliament's nominee for First Minister. I have received seven nominations for the appointment of First Minister. In alphabetical order, they are: Dennis Canavan, Robin Harper, Margo MacDonald, Mr Jack McConnell, David McLetchie, Tommy Sheridan and Mr John Swinney.

Members may note that some of the candidates are sitting towards the front of the chamber. I clarify that that arrangement is for the selection of the nominee for First Minister only and that it does not set a precedent for other business in the chamber.

A copy of the announcement in today's business bulletin explaining the procedure that is to be followed this afternoon has been placed on each member's desk.

I will soon ask each nominated member in turn to speak in support of his or her candidacy for five minutes. After all nominated members have spoken, I will ask members to cast their votes for their preferred candidate. I remind members that they have only one vote throughout the entire proceedings. Once all the voting has been completed, there will be a short delay of a few minutes while the result is verified. I will thereafter announce the number of votes cast, the number of votes for each candidate and the number of abstentions.

A candidate will be selected if an overall majority is obtained. If no such majority is obtained, the candidate or candidates with the smallest number of votes will be eliminated and we will then proceed to a further round of voting. I trust that that is clear. We will now begin the selection process in alphabetical order, as laid down in standing orders.

14:34

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Last night, I ran in the Dumyat hill race. I had as much chance of winning that contest as I have of winning this one, but last night I had the excuse that the front runners were Scotland's crème de la crème. This afternoon I shall have no such excuse.

I thank Margo MacDonald and Dr Jean Turner for nominating and seconding me. I was pleased to nominate Margo, who thereby makes another wee bit of Scottish history by becoming the first woman to be nominated for the job of First Minister. If either of us wins this ballot, Margo

MacDonald and I intend to job share in what would be a unique example of political power sharing that would be based on the realisation that nobody, but nobody, could ever dictate to Margo. Perhaps Margo would say the same about me.

The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive need more people of independent mind; the electorate has shown its agreement with that by electing Margo MacDonald, Jean Turner, John Swinburne and me. Too many MSPs behave like puppets, taking their orders from party bosses, and there is too much fixing by political parties. Indeed, the latest pact between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats is itself a fix that has been cobbled up primarily to fix this afternoon's ballot to ensure that Jack McConnell gets the number 1 job, that Jim Wallace gets the number 2 job and that their lackeys get the other jobs, cars, chauffeurs and other ministerial perks.

More power should be given to the people rather than to party machines, both in the determination of policy and in the selection of candidates for particular jobs. Four years ago, the voters in Falkirk West showed what they thought of the Labour party's selection system and, this year, the voters of Lothian region showed what they thought of the SNP's selection system. It is the people, not the party bosses, who should decide who is number 1, who is number 2, who is number 3 and so on. That is why the single transferable vote system should be introduced not only in local government elections, as proposed in the Lib-Lab agreement, but in elections to the Scottish Parliament. In that way, the Parliament would be more representative of the people and more responsive to their needs and priorities.

During the recent election campaign, people told me that their needs and priorities relate to matters such as health, education, jobs, transport, housing, the environment and a fairer deal for our senior citizens. It is unfortunate that those priorities have not always been reflected in the decisions of the Scottish Parliament; for example, the escalating cost of the new Parliament building in Holyrood is a national scandal—most people would prefer that £400 million to be spent on schools and hospitals.

Speaking of hospitals, one of my—sorry, Margo, I mean one of our—first ministerial appointments would be to make Dr Jean Turner the minister for health, so that she could fulfil her mandate to save Stobhill hospital and ensure better health services throughout Scotland in order that, once again, our national health service becomes the envy of the world. I would also appoint John Swinburne to be minister for senior citizens so that he could bring about a fairer deal for that age group. I would appoint a dedicated minister for sport to ensure that sport for all was given more priority.

Furthermore, in order to emphasise to the nation that success should be based on merit, I would ask the minister for sport, on day 1, to lift the phone to call Lex Gold—the chairman of the Scottish Premier League—to remind him that it is the will of the Scottish Parliament that Falkirk Football Club, as champions of the first division, should be promoted to the Scottish Premier League.

I do not, however, want to be merely parochial—I want the whole of Scotland to be promoted to the top league to ensure that we are champions on the world stage in health, education, enterprise, eradication of poverty and the building of a better future for all the people of Scotland. That is what we were elected to do and that is how the people will judge us over the next four years.

14:39

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I rise to put the case for my appointment as the first Green First Minister of any Parliament in Europe. I base my case on my commitment to the Scottish Parliament and the vision of accessible and responsive politics that it represents; on my experience in and out of Parliament; on my record of public service; on my work as an informal ambassador for the Scottish Parliament and finally—and most important—on the manifesto of my political party and the commitment of all Scottish Greens to the development of a new economics, of environmental and social justice and of a sustainable future not only for Scotland, but for our planet.

I quote the US ecologist Barry Commoner. Thirty years ago, he wrote:

"To resolve the environmental crisis, we shall need to forgo, at last, the luxury of tolerating poverty, racial discrimination and war. In our unwitting march toward ecological suicide we have run out of options."

Many writers and economists have since written extensively on the need to develop an economic system that does not destroy our planet, but which will help to sustain it through respect for all forms of life and ecological systems, and on the need to recognise that we must accept with humility our place in the systems that sustain us.

To put it mundanely, Scotland's environment contributes £17 billion of value to our economy every year. That is only £3 billion short of the Executive's £20 billion spend. Even at that materialistic level, it is clear that it is desperately important that we conserve and improve what we have.

Contrary to the views that are occasionally peddled in the press, the Scottish Green Party's policies would be good news for the Scottish economy, for the environment and for human

health, dignity and happiness in Scotland. Our tax policies and commitment to help small businesses would be good news for the 70 per cent of Scotland's work force who are employed in small and medium-sized enterprises.

Our transport policies—which include congestion charging and rebalancing the budget from road to rail—would also be good news for small business, for the business and financial sectors, and for commuters, walkers, cyclists and the 40 per cent of Scottish people who do not own a car, but who have a right of access to affordable and reliable public transport and clean air to breathe. Our green jobs policy would also be excellent news for the manufacturing industries, particularly in Aberdeen and on Clydeside. Our education policy would free up the school curriculum and it would allow better access to appropriate further and higher education courses. Our dedication to the regeneration and strengthening of communities is without doubt.

Where energy generation and conservation are concerned, the Executive and other non-Executive parties are in serious danger of completely missing the point. We argue that much greater emphasis needs to be placed on conservation; the warm homes bill that we have proposed would begin to address that. We could reduce the domestic demand for electricity and gas in Scotland by 30 per cent within 15 years if we really tried to do it, which would mean less demand for terrestrial wind farms and would buy time for the introduction of the big winners in electricity generation—offshore wind, wave and tidal power.

Over the past four years, the Executive has singularly failed to recognise the contribution that can be made to sustainable energy production by combined heat and power systems, solar gain, photovoltaic energy, biofuels and other alternative energy sources, community heating systems and by demanding much higher energy conservation standards in public buildings, offices and factories. Present policies will not control pollution from private transport for nearly 20 years. Our recycling policy, which is fully grounded in the huge and largely unacknowledged contribution from the voluntary sector, would be excellent news for rural and urban communities.

Of my achievements in the previous parliamentary session, one of the more significant was my amendment to the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill, which secured an integrated approach across all Government ministries. To secure an overall integrated approach, I would appoint a dedicated environment minister. I would also appoint a minister for the marine environment, who would have responsibility for marine national parks and the proposed Scottish waters whale sanctuary.

My Government would address those and many more issues. By “my Government”, I mean a coalition of the parties that could be persuaded to group around principles of environmental justice, social justice and ecological sustainability more convincingly than the Lib-Lab coalition's patched-together offering, which we have seen today—except that I have not seen it, because the coalition has not yet shown the courtesy of sending it to the smaller parties.

One day, such a Government will have to happen. Perhaps it will not happen today, but if there had been just six fewer Labour members than are present, we might have had seriously to consider a similar proposition today.

I made 450 speeches and 1,600 interventions in the previous session of Parliament. I am proud of the Parliament. I am proud of what we have done in the previous four years and of the way in which we have done it. The thoroughness of the consultation work of the committees, the public's access to individual MSPs, the 600 petitions that the Public Petitions Committee heard and the cross-party groups' invaluable informal work are rarely acknowledged. A first duty of whoever is appointed First Minister must be to encourage Parliament and the nation to value the way in which we do our work as well as to value what we do.

14:45

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I thank Dennis Canavan for allowing me to create a little bit of the Scottish Parliament's history by being the first woman member to be nominated as First Minister. I sincerely hope that that precedent will be followed in the not-too-distant future by some of the very talented women who are present in all parts of the chamber. To spare their blushes and their future careers, I will not mention them by name.

To spare the present incumbent of the office any anxiety that all the intense late-night talks that he undertook with the Liberal Democrats might turn out to be nothing more than a poignant, albeit brief, meeting of hearts and minds, I confess that I have no great expectation of being elected First Minister, given that the dogs in the street—to say nothing of the parliamentary press corps—tell me that the smart money is on Jack McConnell. However, just in case anything should go wrong with the electronic voting system—some members know to their cost that things can go wrong with it—and I am elected to fill his shoes, I assure the man most likely to be selected that I will immediately demand a recount. Sorry, Dennis—there goes the job share.

It is not that I would not like the chance to do the job. I am happy to contribute to the work of the

Parliament as an independent but, as the organisation and order that must underpin effective governance are best delivered via the party system, MSPs might prefer what Jack McConnell will bring to the job. However, in this Parliament of minorities, the leader of the largest party has a responsibility not only to lead his own party well, but to see that the contributions of the other parties and of independent members are considered on their merits and not on their origin. That is what the electorate voted for.

Most of us know that the Scots who thought it worth their while voted in the hope, rather than in the expectation, that their party of choice would on its own make an appreciable difference to their lives. The incoming First Minister is obligated to make use of all the talents in the Parliament. Something of that has already been achieved with the Liberal Democrats, but even the sensible agreement on proportional representation for local councils will not be enough to persuade Scots of the worth and wisdom of the Scottish Parliament. PR can certainly enhance the quality of the democratic process, but only if the electorate plays its part by using the single transferable vote system. People will do that only if they believe that their votes will make a difference to the services and charges that are operated by local councils. Before they can make that judgment, never mind be sufficiently motivated to act on it by using their vote, they will require to be much better informed about the extent of the powers that are vested in local councils.

How the Parliament promotes and expedites PR in local government is only one example of how we must demonstrate fair judgment and a sense of proportion in facilitating improvements in the services for which we are responsible. More than that, we must raise the expectations of what Scotland might achieve if the powers of the Parliament were to be extended—to jurisdiction over all aspects of the care and well-being of the elderly, for example. The provision of free personal care improves on previous United Kingdom policy, but could—and would—a Scottish Parliament restore the link between pensions and earnings if it exercised full fiscal freedom?

I welcome the Chancellor of the Exchequer's prudent decision against joining the euro at this stage, but would not we benefit from having a much deeper debate and analysis of Scotland's particular interest in adopting the single European currency than the analysis attempted this week by the Secretary of State for Scotland? Of at least equal importance, should not the Scottish Parliament assume moral and political responsibility for informing Scots of how the proposed new European Union constitution will impact on the Parliament and on their lives? As well as getting the trains using the new Borders

rail link to run on time, the Parliament must inspire Scots to tackle head on the challenges and dilemmas of our contemporary global village. If we artificially confine our interest or responsibility to our small corner, we will think small thoughts and do small things.

Scots say that they want more powers for the Parliament. It is they who empower MSPs, but we can offer leadership in helping them to discover which powers and responsibilities they are willing to assume. Do they want responsibility for all taxation and spending; for whether to commit troops to war; or even for which prescription drugs and food additives should be available?

The Parliament can facilitate such debate and dialogue without diluting its duty to act within its present powers, but that requires an open-mindedness that was too often absent in the previous session of Parliament. The partisan soundbites from parties on both sides of the constitutional divide lowered the intellectual reputation of the Parliament and made voters despair of us. The First Minister has said that the Parliament has disappointed Scots. I believe that democracy demands that, as an essential element of the communal self-respect that underpins democratic institutions, the Scottish Parliament must in its second session regain its electors' trust and hope.

We can start by properly investigating and explaining to Scots the reasons for what they see as the greatest shortcoming of the first session: the management of the Holyrood project. That would be a good start. In case I am unsuccessful in the vote for First Minister, I assure whoever is elected of my support whenever he displays magnanimity and imagination in re-engaging the Scottish Parliament with people in Scotland and beyond.

14:51

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I start this afternoon by thanking the people of Motherwell and Wishaw. I am grateful for the honour of representing them again in the Scottish Parliament. I also thank the Scottish Labour party and my colleagues for their support in my seeking this nomination today.

After 18 months as First Minister, I have never been more certain of the priorities for Scotland and of our purpose for the next four years. Government must be on the side of decent, hard-working Scots. We must grow the Scottish economy to create good jobs and must reform public services to deliver excellence. We must strengthen communities, shifting the balance of power away from those who intimidate and disrupt the lives of ordinary families. I ask members to

support my nomination to the post of First Minister today because I believe that within our grasp we have the chance to change Scotland for good—a chance to create a Scotland that we can all be proud to call home.

The people of Scotland had high expectations for the Parliament, but too many are yet to be convinced that we are a force for good. We will listen to them and will raise our game. We will not forget the lessons of the first session, but we will move on.

Scottish Labour MSPs are the biggest group in the Parliament. I believe that Scots want us to push forward with our policies for growing the economy, improving public services and dealing with antisocial behaviour and crime. However, we live in a pluralist Scotland. No party or individual has the monopoly of representation or ideas. Labour has formed a partnership with our Liberal Democrat colleagues to govern Scotland, and there is strength in what we have agreed. The words of the partnership agreement matter, but it is the action that will have the greatest meaning. For this second session, there must be no business as usual or simply more of the same. People are impatient for change, and I am, too.

Eighteen months ago, the chamber elected me Scotland's First Minister. My priorities were education, health, crime, transport and jobs. I said that Government would focus, and it has. Educational attainment is up; health service waiting times are finally coming down; transport improvements are happening; and Scottish unemployment is at its lowest level for a generation. We are on the right track—good progress is being made. We are doing what we said we would do, but there is still much more to be done.

The work will continue, but it will be quicker, smarter and sharper. We have reached a turning-point. In the first session of the Parliament, we saw devolution develop in Scotland. In the second session of the Parliament, devolution must deliver for Scotland.

We will move fast to implement the partnership agreement, our top priority being to grow the Scottish economy. To build an enterprise culture, we will reform bankruptcy law and mainstream enterprise education in Scotland's schools. To cut waiting times and class sizes, we will invest in and reform public services. We will use new powers to let local leaders lead, to reward success and to tackle failure. To tackle crime and disorder on Scotland's streets, we will introduce new orders for parents and antisocial neighbours. We will reform our courts and deal with persistent young offenders.

They are only a minority of young people. I am very proud that my 18 months as First Minister

saw the introduction of free personal care and free local bus travel for older people, but I believe passionately that our second term should be characterised by the better services and opportunities that we deliver for Scotland's young people. Every young person in Scotland will be given a chance. If at first they do not succeed, they will get another chance; we will not give up on them and we will leave no one behind. For young Scots, our Government will deliver better student bursaries, concessionary travel, allowances for the less well-off to stay on at school, fairer student loans, more proper apprenticeships and credit for the voluntary work that they do in their communities.

We will govern well and we will work with others. We will govern for all Scotland: town and country, island and mainland. Government is much more than just administering effectively. It is more than just making good laws. It is more than just improving services. It is about political leadership, too. It is about the strength of our convictions. Scotland's First Minister should make hard choices and tackle hard issues, sometimes saying things that others would prefer not to hear.

So I will not be afraid to speak up, even if it is not popular to do so. I want to and I will challenge the shame of sectarianism and tackle prejudice and racism. I want to open our doors and be welcoming to new talent, as other countries have been to Scots. I want us to recognise, respect and protect the fragility of our natural environment and I want the gaps between rich and poor to be narrowed, not least in health as well as in income. Most of all I want children and young people to believe that they can do anything and that they can go on to realise their dreams, for no young Scot should be criticised for having ideas above their station.

That is why I want to be First Minister. We should set our sights high, serve well those who elect us and aim to create the kind of Scotland that all Scots—young and old—can be proud to call home.

14:57

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)
(Con): This is the fourth occasion in the life of the Parliament on which I have stood for election as First Minister. I do not expect the outcome to be any different today—after all, it is quite rightly a first-past-the-post election—but I will nevertheless highlight the clear distinction between, on the one hand, the Scottish Conservatives and, on the other, the various parties on the left, from pale pink to flaming red, that predominate in the chamber.

I congratulate the Executive party on its victory in the election, albeit with a reduced majority. To

the victors go the spoils and, following Mr McConnell's election today, another small army of ministers will presumably be mustered to continue the over-government of this country that was such a feature of the past four years.

A cursory reading of the new partnership agreement certainly tells us that the nanny state is very much to the fore. Apparently there are to be national frameworks, strategies, plans, measures and reviews for safe walking, healthy eating, alcohol drinking and sexual health. When Cro-Magnon man and woman roamed over our wee bit hills and glens 1 million years ago, the human race had already mastered those basic skills and functions, but apparently that is not good enough for the Scottish Executive. We need to be born again, and so what we have is a programme not for devolution or for revolution, but for the reinvention of evolution.

Of course, all that comes with a price tag and the real prospect of further massive increases in the cost of running government in Scotland on top of the £100 million rise that we have already identified. I was intrigued to note an element of contrition during the election campaign when the First Minister advised us that he would set up an inquiry into the scandal of the Holyrood Parliament building. Of course, that is the equivalent of shutting the stable door after the £300 million horse has bolted. Perhaps a suitable subject for the inquiry would be how it was that in the previous session of Parliament, on no fewer than four occasions, Labour and Liberal Democrat members voted, as they did time and time again, to write one blank cheque after another, which Mr McConnell happily signed.

The events of the fortnight since the election tell us a lot about the perverse priorities of not only the Executive party but others represented in this new Parliament. The Greens seem to think that it is more important to register a civil partnership than it is to save the planet. The Scottish Socialist Party wants to give free school meals to the children of well-paid politicians, such as me and Rosie Kane, who can well afford to feed our own children. As for the Scottish National Party, it is apparently in a state of constitutional turmoil trying to work out whether it still believes in independence in Scotland, independence in Britain, independence in Europe or, indeed, independence at all.

None of that should be on our agenda. We need to move on from the Parliament of nonsense to a Parliament of common sense. Back in the real world, people in Scotland want to know why, six years on and 60 tax increases later, they must still wait longer on longer waiting lists for treatment in our hospitals. People wonder why our state education system still fails far too many of our young people, why violent crime is rising and too

many communities are blighted by disorder and vandalism, and why the performance of the Scottish economy still lags behind that of the United Kingdom as a whole.

A look at the partnership agreement reveals nothing about the fundamental reforms that are necessary to improve our health service. There are weasel words on police numbers and not one word about cutting business rates in Scotland to the levels in the rest of the UK, or about reducing the burden of regulation and red tape that is strangling enterprise in this country. I note that the First Minister said that the partnership's top priority was to grow the economy and that its first measure would be to improve the bankruptcy laws for all the businesses that will go bust as a result of his programme.

That is why we will advocate a programme that is based on the principle of decentralisation and of real devolution—a programme that seeks to reduce the scope and powers of the state and its agencies and to give them back to parents, patients, professionals and local communities.

Scotland needs a Government and a First Minister that understand that. Scotland needs a Government that stops wasting money on parliamentary palaces and bureaucratic empires and that starts spending it wisely on our public services. Scotland needs a Government that trusts the Scottish people and seeks to empower them, not to dictate to them. That is not the sort of Government that Scotland will have from today or for the next four years, but it is what I stand for, it is what the Scottish Conservatives stand for and it is the course that we will follow in this session of Parliament.

15:02

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): On Monday of this week, the Office for National Statistics released a stunning and shameful set of figures. The Government's own data expose the stark reality that, under new Labour, Britain is even more unequal than it was during the previous 18 years of Tory destruction. In fact, under Tory Blair, inequality is one sixth higher than it was during Thatcher's 11 years of darkness. New Labour's millionaire-friendly and big-business policies are not tackling poverty and inequality, but are leading to a more unequal society that is divided between the haves and the have-nots, the wealthy and the rest. Under new Labour, pensioner incomes have been reduced in real terms. Since 1999 alone, 20 per cent more of Britain's pensioners have been means tested.

That information forms the essential background to the coalition agreement and to the election contest for First Minister. The first four years of the

Parliament presided over an increase in poverty and inequality throughout Scotland. The single biggest growth in poverty is among the army of low-paid workers. Far too often, the unemployed poor have become the employed poor. Too many Scots are pathetically low paid for the vital jobs that they do. According to the Government's figures, 40 per cent of the adult poor are in employment. For socialists, poverty and inequality are the biggest priorities that the Parliament faces. We must introduce the measures that are necessary to increase the disposable income and to improve the quality of life of our pensioners and ordinary workers.

A new society requires an independent socialist Scotland, but even within the constitutional straitjacket of the Scotland Act 1998 we could begin to make a real difference. Replacing the unfair council tax with a progressive and redistributive services tax based on income would improve the weekly income of 77 per cent of Scots. An average pensioner in Scotland would be £62 a month better off. An ancillary worker in the national health service would be £55 a month better off. A firefighter would be £40 a month better off. Of course, every member of the Scottish Parliament would pay more—at least £1,000 more. The First Minister, whose current salary is £118,000, would pay £16,700 a year more.

It is only right and proper that those of us who are overpaid and well paid should contribute more to local jobs and services. That is the consolation for David McLetchie. Although he would pay more for his local services, if he has any children they would get a free school meal as part of the Parliament's redistributive policies.

We need a public sector workers package that improves the wages and conditions of the workers who run our schools and hospitals but who are pathetically low paid for the essential jobs that they do. MSPs who are on almost £50,000 a year have no right to deny public sector workers a minimum wage of £13,300 a year. Let us have a proper minimum wage. Let us have a shorter working week, to improve the standard and quality of life of the public sector workers in this country. We do not yet have power over the private sector, but let us ensure that we improve wages and conditions in those areas over which we have power.

The coalition agreement refers to free eye tests and free dental check-ups. That is good because they are long overdue, but what about free prescriptions? What about free school meals? Free school meals would tackle the stigma that still scars this country and divides children at the age of five depending on the level of their mother and father's income. Let us give every child in Scotland a decent healthy, nutritious meal with

milk and water. I say to David McLetchie that in that way we would not divide anyone, but would treat everyone as Jock Tamson's bairns.

On that subject, let us stop labelling young people as neds and criminals. Let us remember that every young person has potential and that our job as politicians is to create the conditions that allow that potential to flourish.

What divides socialists from the big-business parties and from the coalition agreement is our attitude to poverty and inequality. The coalition agreement document contains 14,400 words, but it mentions poverty three times and inequality once. That is the priority that the coalition accords to tackling poverty and inequality. I ask members to vote for a First Minister who will put the tackling of poverty and inequality at the top of the agenda instead of at the bottom.

15:08

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): It seems pretty likely that the leader of the largest minority party in the Parliament, with the help of the fourth-largest minority party, will be successful in this afternoon's election. The next Scottish Government will need to take our country through what promises to be a time of immense challenge both at home and in the wider international community. In a little over 12 months, the European Union will grow from 15 member states to 25 and a new European constitution will emerge. How we respond to those seismic changes at home and abroad will determine the future of our country's prosperity.

Today, the new Parliament has spoken. We have heard widely differing speeches from those who wish to be the First Minister of this country. We have heard speeches from politicians who yearn for a green nuclear-free Scotland, from others who believe passionately in a war on poverty and in the removal of Trident from the Clyde, and from those who want to put the Scottish economy centre stage. I share those aspirations. They reflect the new and diverse political landscape of modern Scotland. There are different aspirations, but there is a single challenge: how to make those aspirations a reality. If we want to make Scotland genuinely green and nuclear free, we must have control over energy policy. If we want to remove Trident from Faslane and conduct a war on poverty, we must have the power to do so. We can talk every day from now until 2007 about growing the Scottish economy, but we can transform Scotland's economic performance only if we have full power over Scotland's economic policy.

The first sentence of the introductory section of the new partnership agreement says:

"Growing the economy is our top priority."

I welcome that commitment from the partnership Government. It is a clear benchmark by which the success or failure of the new Government can be measured. However, the omens are not promising, because the partnership agreement proposes the same business-as-usual policies that last year produced a zero economic growth rate in Scotland. The hard reality is that we need to have the full range of economic and financial powers that other countries take for granted—the powers of independence—if we want to turn round the Scottish economy and give new hope to the people of our country.

I look forward to a battle of ideas on how we can transform the economic prospects of our country and people. There will be fierce debate on that issue, but I am sure that there will also be room for agreement on improving our public services and every Scot's quality of life. I also agree warmly with the commitment to introduce proportional representation to local government, which is a much-needed and long-overdue reform.

I offer the pledge that where we agree with the Government over the next four years, we will say so. We will not oppose the Government just because we are in opposition. We will play our part in letting the Parliament breathe and ensuring that the best argument prevails, not the strongest party machine.

What we do in the chamber is crucial to the restoring of public confidence in the Parliament. All of us, regardless of party, should be alarmed that less than half of the electorate voted on 1 May. That is our responsibility and we must do what we can to put it right. To put it right, we must show people that voting matters and that the Parliament can fulfil the people's ambitions. For the SNP and some of the other parties, that means taking on the full powers of independence. We will make those arguments in the Parliament.

We can go some way to restoring confidence under existing powers by better government based on values and by always standing up for Scotland—whether it be for people contaminated by blood infected with hepatitis C, or for our fishing communities that are under attack from the EU and weakened by hopeless United Kingdom negotiating. The lesson to be learned from the past four years is that if Scotland's national Parliament will not stand up for Scotland's national interest, no one else will.

Scotland was once described as "an attitude of mind". Over the next four years, I hope that we in the chamber can help to promote a new Scottish attitude that is confident and outward looking, that embraces the idea that our country is our responsibility and that recognises that the people

of the nation have abundant talent and ability to make Scotland all that it can be. That is why I want to be First Minister—to make our country all that it can be—and we will be able to do that when we have the normal powers of a normal country.

The Presiding Officer: The Parliament will now move on to voting. Members should ensure that their cards are correctly inserted in the console and that the light adjacent to the card slot is not lit. I advise new members that their face should show at the top of their card.

I remind members that they have one yes vote only throughout the entire proceedings. If any member casts more than one yes vote, their votes will be treated as spoiled. Do not use the no or abstain buttons. Any member who has not already voted and wishes to record an abstention will have an opportunity to do so at the end of voting for candidates.

As usual, members will have 30 seconds in which to cast their vote. There will be a pause of approximately one minute between votes in order to allow voting records to be printed.

The first vote is for those who wish to support Dennis Canavan. Members who wish to cast their vote for Mr Canavan should vote yes now.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: There will now be a pause of around one minute to allow the voting record to be printed.

The next vote is for members who wish to support Robin Harper. Members who wish to cast their vote for Mr Harper should vote yes now.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The next vote is for members who wish to support Margo MacDonald. Members who wish to cast their vote for Ms MacDonald should vote yes now.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The next vote is for members who wish to support Jack McConnell. Members who wish to cast their vote for Mr McConnell should vote yes now.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: During the voting, the clerks take great care with the records. I regret to say that one card did not register during the previous vote. Therefore, I have no alternative but to re-run that vote, which is for members who wish to support Jack McConnell. Members who wish to cast their vote for Mr McConnell should vote yes now.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The next vote is for members who wish to support David McLetchie. Members who wish to cast their vote for Mr McLetchie should vote yes now.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The next vote is for members who wish to support Tommy Sheridan. Members who wish to cast their vote for Mr Sheridan should vote yes now.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The next vote is for members who wish to support John Swinney. Members who wish to cast their vote for Mr Swinney should vote yes now.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the votes for the candidates.

The next vote is for members who have not voted at all and who wish to record an abstention. Members who wish to record an abstention should press their yes buttons now.

The voting period has now ended. There will be a pause of four to five minutes while the votes are verified.

I inform members that the total number of votes cast was 127. There were no spoiled votes or abstentions. The total number of votes per candidate was: Dennis Canavan 2, Robin Harper 6, Margo MacDonald 2, Mr Jack McConnell 67, David McLetchie 18, Tommy Sheridan 6, Mr John Swinney 26.

VOTES FOR DENNIS CANAVAN

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

VOTES FOR ROBIN HARPER

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

VOTES FOR MARGO MACDONALD

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

VOTES FOR MR JACK MCCONNELL

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Mr Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)

Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
Purvis, Mr Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

VOTES FOR DAVID MCLETCHE

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

VOTES FOR TOMMY SHERIDAN

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

VOTES FOR MR JOHN SWINNEY

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Mr Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Mr Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: As the result is valid, and as Jack McConnell received more votes than the total number of votes for all other candidates, I declare that he is selected as the Parliament's nominee for appointment as the First Minister. *[Applause.]*

As required by the Scotland Act 1998, I shall now recommend to Her Majesty that she appoint Jack McConnell as the First Minister. I give him my warm congratulations and best wishes.

15:37

The First Minister: Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. I thank my colleagues in the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, who voted for me today and who voted yesterday for a partnership that will make a real difference in Scotland. I also thank everyone else in the chamber for the way in which we have conducted the selection, the speeches and the voting and, I am sure, for the way in which we will conduct the aftermath.

We live in interesting times. Who would have thought that an independent Margo MacDonald would be the first woman to stand for the post of First Minister in our new Scottish Parliament? I am a bit disappointed that she did not ask me to be her job sharer before she asked Dennis Canavan. Who would have thought that we would be in a Scottish Parliament where Tommy Sheridan sat to the right of the Tories?

I wish all the parties, all the party leaders and the independents well in our debates in the next four years. I hope that, in the way in which we conduct ourselves, the passion with which we make our arguments, the coherence of those arguments and the deliberation of our votes, we can make a real difference to the lives of people in Scotland and to their confidence in us as their politicians.

In my earlier speech, I said that I wanted a Scotland in which everybody, young and old, could feel proud of their Parliament. To achieve that, we must have action to deliver justice in our communities for those who are plagued by disorder; to ensure that investment in the health service is matched by reforms that put the patient first; and to ensure in our education service that we raise the aspirations and achievements of all young Scots. We must also ensure that we have action in the Parliament to rebuild confidence, to let the best ideas emerge, to listen to one another and to be firm in our resolve to do better. If we do that, we can be a Parliament that is on the side of ordinary Scots.

During the election campaign, I met pensioners in Dundee and families in Cardonald who want government in Scotland on their side, and they were right. We in the Parliament, and the Government that I lead as First Minister, will be on their side. We will ensure that their voices are heard and that the right action is taken.

I want to mention one young Scot and one old Scot who are in the public gallery today. The last time that I was elected First Minister, my grandmother was not here, but she is here today. I believe that in Beith they call her "First Grandma". She has always been first Grandma to me and I am delighted that she is here. During the election campaign, my nephew spent 10 days in a coma. He is here today; he is alive and I am very pleased about that.

I am delighted to be First Minister again—should Her Majesty approve—and I will be absolutely delighted to serve the Parliament and Scotland over the next four years. I hope that I will make a difference and I hope that I do so with the support not just of the majority of members in the chamber but, from time to time, of all members in the chamber. If we work together, we can make a real difference for all the people we represent. Thank you.

15:41

Mr Swinney: I congratulate Mr McConnell on his re-election as First Minister and wish him well in the period ahead in which he will hold office and face the many difficult issues of structuring his Government. I meant what I said in my earlier speech, that the SNP, as an Opposition, will support the good ideas that come from the Government. We also warmly support one or two of the good ideas that are contained in the coalition document, but Mr McConnell will not be surprised to hear that we will criticise bad ideas—it is our duty to do that.

From time to time, we will suggest better ideas. I hope that Mr McConnell is prepared to carry out the words that he spoke earlier today when he said that he will look at ideas based on merit and not on where they come from and that he will consider the strength of arguments and ideas. Plenty of good ideas come from the SNP benches; I hear them all the time. I willingly offer those ideas to the Government in order to improve the governance of the people of Scotland.

All of us have a duty to ensure that the Scottish Parliament delivers on the expectations and ambitions of people in Scotland. Some of us believe that we will do that only when the root causes and problems that exist in our country can be tackled by a Parliament that has the power to tackle them. However, over the next four years of this Parliament, as the leader of the principal Opposition party, I will ensure that the SNP supports good ideas, criticises bad ideas and suggests the best ideas for the people of Scotland.

15:43

David McLetchie: On behalf of Conservative members, I congratulate Jack McConnell on his election as First Minister. The position of First Minister commands a heavy responsibility and demands a great deal of the individual. In many instances, it places a real burden on him and his family. I wish Jack and Bridget McConnell and their family all the best in discharging the responsibilities of the office over the next four years. A little bit like Mr Swinney did, I say to the First Minister that if he and his Administration wish our support, they have only to look at our wonderful manifesto and act on it and we will willingly give our support.

15:43

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): Over the past few days, I have spent a fair bit of time with Jack McConnell. Despite that—or perhaps, more accurately, because of that—on behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, I warmly welcome Jack McConnell's election as the Parliament's

nominee for First Minister and warmly congratulate him. In electing Jack McConnell this afternoon, we have fulfilled our duty as representatives of the Scottish people to choose a First Minister. I believe that we have made a sound choice.

Over the past decade, I have had cause to work with Jack McConnell on a number of occasions. The first was when our two parties co-operated in the constitutional convention to forge a new future for Scotland. During that process we saw the very welcome step of people from different parties and people from no party co-operating and coming together to put first the interests of building a better Scotland.

For two and a half years, as we sat around the Cabinet table, I saw Jack's abilities as finance minister and education minister. Since November 2001, we have worked closely together as First Minister and Deputy First Minister. It has been a strong and successful partnership that will now continue as, with our respective parties, we co-operate to deliver a new partnership agreement—a strong partnership agreement that addresses the priorities of the people of Scotland and will be good for Scotland's schools, health service, enterprising economy and environment.

While working with Jack McConnell, I have seen his abilities, his hard work, his courage and leadership, and his determination to deliver. Those qualities will hold him and, indeed, Scotland in good stead as we set about delivering our ambitious programme. I have every confidence that he will rise to those challenges and that, together, we can deliver a partnership for a better Scotland.

15:45

Robin Harper: I congratulate Jack McConnell on his election and guarantee that my colleagues in the Scottish Green Party and I will do our best and commit all our energies to ensure that the Parliament works over the next four years to the benefit of the people of Scotland.

Over the past four years, the committee system of the Parliament has been an example of consensus politics—perhaps so consensual that it has rarely attracted the attention of the media. We should be proud of it. Through consensus politics, we hope to engage in the work of the committees to produce the best legislation, adding our ideas and criticisms in a way that is consensual but even more robust and open than in the past four years.

I offer my congratulations and best wishes to Jack McConnell and his family.

15:46

Tommy Sheridan: I congratulate Jack McConnell on his election. We have made another

piece of history today: two former students of the University of Stirling have stood for election as the First Minister of Scotland—at least one of whom still believes in what he did when he was at university, and that is important.

I promise that there will be honest and passionate opposition, when necessary, and constructive support, when deserved. Although I am sitting on the right of the Tories today, Jack McConnell will expect and receive challenges from the left.

The Presiding Officer: The last word, on behalf of Margo MacDonald and himself, will come from Dennis Canavan.

15:47

Dennis Canavan: The University of Stirling has a lot to answer for. Jack McConnell will remember that I first met him on the campus of the university when I was the local Labour MP and he was a young student. I congratulate him on his election in the hope that he will use his position as First Minister to improve opportunities for the people of Scotland along the lines that we agreed at our first meeting all those years ago, and along the lines that I reiterated this afternoon. The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive will face many challenges in the four years ahead, and I would like to issue a challenge to Jack this afternoon. What about trying next year's Dumyat hill race, which starts and finishes where we first met, on the campus of his alma mater?

The Presiding Officer: As Dumyat lies in my constituency, I echo that invitation.

Meeting closed at 15:49.

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