

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Monday 14 May 2007

Session 3

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# Scottish Parliament

*Monday 14 May 2007*

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *recommended the proceedings at 15:00*]

## Presiding Officer

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The first meeting of the third session of Parliament is resumed for the election of the Presiding Officer. I have received two valid nominations. In alphabetical order, they are Alex Fergusson and Margo MacDonald. I invite the candidates to make themselves known to the chamber.

The election will proceed in accordance with rule 11.9 of standing orders. Members should remain in their seats until I invite them to collect their ballot papers from the clerks at the back of the chamber. Members with surnames beginning A to G should collect their ballot papers from the desk to my left. Members with surnames beginning H to M should use the desk at the back, and members with surnames beginning N to Z should use the desk to my right.

Members should confirm their name with the clerks before being issued with a ballot paper. For members' privacy in marking ballot papers, voting booths are available at the back of the chamber. Ballot papers should be marked with an X, before being folded and placed in one of the ballot boxes that are provided at the rear of the chamber.

At the end of the voting period, I will invite any scrutineers nominated by each candidate to monitor the counting of votes at the back of the chamber, where clerks will empty the ballot boxes and count the votes. Candidates may also observe the count. I will announce the results when all the votes have been counted and verified.

I declare the election of the Presiding Officer open. Members should proceed to the appropriate desk to collect their ballot papers.

*Members voted by secret ballot.*

**The Presiding Officer:** In the election of the Presiding Officer, the number of votes cast for each candidate was: Alex Fergusson 108, Margo MacDonald 20. Accordingly, as Alex Fergusson gathered more votes than the total number of votes received by the other candidate, and as more than 25 per cent of members voted, Alex Fergusson is elected as the Parliament's Presiding Officer. [*Applause.*]

You have just elected a decent and honourable man to head this house. Alex Fergusson is

experienced both as a regional and as a constituency member. He has the personal authority of having just been returned with a significantly increased majority as the MSP for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale. As a former committee convener, he knows what it is to seek consensus.

Alex must now try the difficult trick of sitting impartially on the fence while keeping his ears pressed firmly to the ground. However, he brings real qualities to that task: a farmer rooted in his native soil, experienced in shepherding his flock in all weathers; a curler accustomed to negotiating the ice; and a keen country dancer who does a mean strip the willow.

At this time of transition in Scottish life, Alex Fergusson brings the gifts of moderation and facilitation to his new position. I give my very best wishes to him, to his wife, Merryn, and to his family. He has the hopes of the whole chamber behind him.

I made my farewells in March. I now invite the Presiding Officer to come forward and take the chair of this Parliament. [*Applause.*]

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Please believe me when I say that a very large part of me would give a lot to be walking out of there now instead of George.

George's exit—as dignified as ever—seems a particularly harsh way for him to leave both the chamber and the office of Presiding Officer. He has served that office with great dignity, but also with honesty, compassion, wit, intelligence, patience and statesmanship. He has been a great servant of Scotland. I do not see his act as one to try to follow blindly, but he has set an impeccably high standard and he has been a shining example for all who follow in his footsteps.

Some of you will have read that I was initially very reluctant to do that—and I was. I did not pursue this position before or during the election and it has come as something of a shock to the electorate of Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, who returned me less than two weeks ago with such a resounding majority. My initial reluctance to put my name forward for this post was born out of the concern that I would not be able to fulfil my commitment to that electorate as their constituency MSP. It was only at the end of last week that I fully persuaded myself that I would and, indeed, could undertake this vital role and simultaneously support and promote my constituents and my constituency. I know that I can and I will.

It has not been an easy decision and sleep was a stranger to me for most of last week and this. I am told that I will probably have to get used to that. However, I was hugely bolstered and affected

by the large number of MSPs who contacted me last week and this to offer me their support. As I begin to take on this great responsibility—and the enormous honour that goes with it—of representing our Parliament, I thank you for that support whole-heartedly.

Everyone I ask agrees that we are in for an interesting time. To make it slightly less interesting—for which I sometimes read contentions—at this stage, I will, like my predecessors, reluctantly suspend my party allegiance for as long as I serve in this office.

Let us all remember that our electorate—the people of Scotland—want this new politics to work for them and that we have a duty to deliver what the electorate expect. I thank you for putting your faith in me and I look forward to working with each and every one of you as we seek to take this third session of the Scottish Parliament forward for the benefit of all our people. *[Applause.]*

**The First Minister (Jack McConnell):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. On behalf of everyone in my party in the Parliament, I congratulate you on your election as Presiding Officer. You and I have similarities in our backgrounds. You have headed up the Blackface Sheep Breeders Association—herding sheep may be one of the challenges that you face in the next four years. I hope that you will serve with the same dignity as your two predecessors and engender the same respect. The next four years will be challenging for the Scottish Parliament, the membership of which reflects a country that is divided in its opinions on political parties and politics at this time. We need someone to preside over the Parliament who embodies the words on the mace: justice, wisdom, compassion and integrity. Each of us should embody those principles every day in carrying out our duties but, in your office more than any other, it is important that you lead us with those principles to the fore.

In George Reid, we had an outstanding Presiding Officer for the past four years. As he said, he said his goodbyes in March. We wish him well and thank him for all that he did. In particular today, we thank him and the parliamentary authorities for conducting a ballot successfully and for transmitting the result electronically to the front of the chamber so that we could hear it.

Presiding Officer, we wish you all the very best. We will give you every support in making the difficult judgments that lie ahead for you. We remind you that a very important role of Parliament is to scrutinise the Government. We look forward to you ensuring from the chair that that is the case. I hope that, in the four years ahead, you enjoy the post as much as we enjoy you holding it.

**Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP):** Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer, I add the warm congratulations of the Scottish National Party on your elevation to Presiding Officer. A great advantage in being elected by a secret ballot in these circumstances is that every single member of the Parliament can swear blind that they voted for you—whether you believe them all is a matter for your judgment and wisdom. As you said, you come to the chair in interesting times—which is, of course, a Chinese curse as well as a Scottish hope—but you bring with you an enormous fund of good will, which stretches across the political parties.

I know you less well than many colleagues do so, as your candidacy emerged in the past few days, I asked other members what kind of man and politician you are. What struck me was that, without equivocation or hesitation, every single member whom I asked, from across the parties, spoke of your integrity and judgment. So although you have a major task in hand, you bring with you formidable qualities. You have formidable political qualities, as the Scottish National Party has found out to our cost in the south-west of Scotland, but also formidable qualities of judgment. You succeed two exceptional Presiding Officers in David Steel and George Reid, and you inherit the chair at a time when great skill will be required, but I am sure that that fund of good will toward you has been well earned and that you will deploy those formidable qualities in the chair. Congratulations.

**Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** Presiding Officer, since coming to the Parliament you have been styled in several ways, the most attractive of which has been as Hercules, but by far the most impressive is as Presiding Officer. We know that you will bring to the job integrity, principles, wisdom, commitment and, in accordance with your Herculean attributes, fortitude.

We have been lucky to have two exceptional Presiding Officers in the Parliament. I am in no doubt whatever that you will continue that distinguished succession. We wish you every good fortune in your new role. We know that our Parliament is in sure and steady hands. To you go our congratulations and our very best wishes.

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen):** Presiding Officer, on behalf of my parliamentary party I congratulate you whole-heartedly on your appointment. We add our support to your kind and generous words about George Reid and the previous Presiding Officers. I am delighted that you took the difficult but important decision to put your name forward. You should not have lost sleep when reaching that

decision. You will make an excellent Presiding Officer because of your reputation for fairness and integrity and because of the qualities that we have all recognised in you over the years working together in the Parliament.

You will do an outstanding job on behalf of the whole Parliament and I welcome your commitment in terms of party office. You have taken an important step and have maintained tradition. I know that the job of Presiding Officer is not always easy. I hope that you will enjoy it most of the time. It is a vital job, not just for the Parliament but for the whole of Scotland. I know that you will do it outstandingly well.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** Presiding Officer, I was delighted that you were re-elected to the Parliament and I am delighted to welcome you as our Presiding Officer. I know from experience, particularly from the cross-party group on ME, how dedicated you are to matters of the heart where people are concerned, how dedicated you are to transparency and honesty in politics, and how good a job you will do as our Presiding Officer. I do not think that we could have entrusted the job to a safer pair of hands. You have the good wishes and the good will of the Scottish Green Party throughout the next four years.

**The Presiding Officer:** I will do my utmost to live up to the generous and kind words that have been spoken. On Mr Stephen's comment about whether I will have an easy job, that is in members' hands, not mine.

We move to the business of the positions of Deputy Presiding Officer. Nominations will open at 3.45. Members may collect nomination forms from the business team in room T1.03, which is located within the office of the chamber desk. Completed nomination forms should be returned to the business team no later than 4 o'clock, so members will have 15 minutes to fill them in and return them. When submitting nomination papers, candidates or their representatives may wish to provide the name of any member who will act as scrutineer on behalf of the candidate.

I suspend this meeting until quarter past 4.

15:33

*Meeting suspended.*

16:15

*On resuming—*

## **Deputy Presiding Officers**

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** The next item of business is the election of two Deputy Presiding Officers. I have received four valid nominations for the position of Deputy Presiding Officer. I will now announce the nominations and ask the candidates, as their names are announced, to make themselves known to the chamber. In alphabetical order, the nominations are Trish Godman, Alasdair Morgan, Margaret Smith and Jamie Stone.

The election will again proceed in accordance with rule 11.9 of standing orders, with the same voting procedures as those used in the election of the Presiding Officer. If no member receives an absolute majority in the first round of voting, there will be subsequent rounds. That procedure will also be followed for the election of the second Deputy Presiding Officer. When the first Deputy Presiding Officer is elected, voting rounds will begin for the election of the second Deputy Presiding Officer, involving all candidates who were unsuccessful in the election of the first Deputy Presiding Officer.

I declare the election of the first Deputy Presiding Officer open.

*Members voted by secret ballot.*

**The Presiding Officer:** In the first round of voting in the election of the first Deputy Presiding Officer, the number of votes cast for each candidate was: Trish Godman 47, Alasdair Morgan 55, Margaret Smith 12, Jamie Stone 8. As no candidate has achieved a clear majority, we will rerun the election with three candidates. Having received the lowest number of votes, Jamie Stone is eliminated.

There will be a short break while new ballot papers are printed—I am afraid that that is inevitable.

16:31

*Meeting suspended.*

16:35

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** Just before I invite members to vote again, I should have said that we had four spoiled papers in the first round of voting. Believe it or not, they were caused by people voting more than once. I am quite aware that we have heard that before, but I suggest to members

that they should vote for only one candidate on the paper. The next voting period is now open.

*Members voted by secret ballot.*

**The Presiding Officer:** In the second round of voting in the election of the first Deputy Presiding Officer, the total number of votes cast was 127. The number of votes cast for each candidate was: Trish Godman 49, Alasdair Morgan 61, Margaret Smith 16. As no candidate has received an overall majority, Margaret Smith is now eliminated and we go forward to a further round of voting, with Trish Godman and Alasdair Morgan as the candidates. I suspend the meeting for five minutes while ballot papers are printed.

16:48

*Meeting suspended.*

16:52

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** The third voting period is now open.

*Members voted by secret ballot.*

**The Presiding Officer:** In the third round of voting in the election of the first Deputy Presiding Officer, the total number of votes cast was 126. The number of votes cast for each candidate was: Trish Godman 49, Alasdair Morgan 77. There were no spoiled papers or abstentions. Accordingly, as Alasdair Morgan received more votes than the other candidate and as more than 25 per cent of members voted, Alasdair Morgan is elected as a Deputy Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament. [*Applause.*]

Voting rounds will now begin for the election of the second Deputy Presiding Officer, involving all three candidates who were unsuccessful in the election of the first Deputy Presiding Officer. As you may suspect, there will now be a short break while ballot papers are printed.

17:04

*Meeting suspended.*

17:07

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** Voting will now begin. You know the procedure by now.

*Members voted by secret ballot.*

**The Presiding Officer:** In the first round of voting in the election of the second Deputy Presiding Officer, the total number of votes cast was 126. The number of votes cast for each

candidate was: Trish Godman 69, Margaret Smith 48, Jamie Stone 8.

Accordingly, as Trish Godman has received more votes than the total number of votes received by the other candidates and as more than 25 per cent of members voted, Trish Godman is elected as the second Deputy Presiding Officer. [*Applause.*]

Before I close the meeting, I congratulate the successful members, Alasdair Morgan and Trish Godman, on their election. I thank everybody who has taken part in the elections, in particular Margo MacDonald, whom I should have thanked earlier. I am grateful to her for making an election for the post of Presiding Officer and giving the Parliament the choice that it deserves. [*Applause.*]

I now close the first meeting of the third session of the Scottish Parliament.

*Meeting closed at 17:22.*



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