

Matheson scandal continues to cast long shadow over Parliament at FMQs

The expenses scandal surrounding Michael Matheson continues to dominate The Scottish Parliament as the First Minister faced a cross-party challenge on the controversy on Thursday afternoon.

Scottish Conservative leader, Douglas Ross, began the weekly proceedings by asking First Minister John Swinney, who has not suspended Matheson from the SNP: "In what other walk of life would Michael Matheson have a job?"

This comes as Matheson, Scotland's former health secretary, was suspended from Parliament on Wednesday for 27 days for claiming parliamentary expenses for an £11,000 iPad bill.

Responding to Ross, First Minister Swinney said: "The issues in relation to the case of Michael Matheson have been well exercised within Parliament and Parliament came to its conclusions yesterday and I accept the conclusions that Parliament arrived at last night."

Swinney, as well as the rest of the SNP, abstained from Wednesday's vote that resulted in Matheson's suspension.

When challenged on this abstention today, Swinney said: "The reason why I did not vote for it last night is because I felt the process was tainted."

“For the reasons I rehearsed last week at First Minister’s Questions, and yesterday Parliament said in relation to the points that I have raised and Mr Ross voted for this, that the actions that led to the issues that caused me concern, runs the risk of the committee report being open to bias and prejudice and the complaint being prejudged, thereby bringing the Parliament into disrepute.”

Scottish Labour leader, Anas Sarwar, also questioned the First Minister, about Michael Mathewson, saying that “rather than defending Scots and protecting the integrity of Parliament, John Swinney chose to put his party before the country.

“Had this been at Westminster, Michael Matheson will now be facing a recall petition and potentially a by election, but yet again the SNP holds Scotland to a lower standard and believe it’s one rule for them and another rule for everyone else.”

Sarwar proceeded to criticise the government’s record on NHS waiting times and Swinney’s preoccupation on party politics.

He said: “While John Swinney spent all of his time this week managing his party and defending sleaze, waiting lists in Scotland reached a record high. Now over 840,000 Scots are stuck on an NHS waiting list. More than one in 10 have been waiting more than a year. Why is John Swinney putting the SNP first, not Scotland?”

In response, the First Minister said: “We are reducing the longest waits and we are making headway. That in relation to the volume of activity within the National Health Service, the statistics this week indicate an increase in the level of activity within the National Health Service to begin to eat into those long waiting times, which I accept are far too long for too many people.

“But the steps that the government is taking through the investment of £30 million in the waiting times programme; the

establishment of the National Treatment Centres, which are already making an impact in this activity and which are producing some of that welcome level of increased activity; combined with the focus in the National Health Service on tackling the longest waits of the measures the government is taking forward to ensure that we tackle the legitimate issue that Mr. Sarwar raises.”

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader and health spokesman Alex Cole-Hamilton said: “More and more Scots are left waiting for vital scans, critical tests, and life-saving treatment. Patients in Scotland deserve better. They need a government which is focused on the basics.

“Whatever John Swinney says about his priorities the SNP’s record is clear. They have failed to give our hard-working NHS staff the beds, safe staffing and resources they desperately need.”