

# **Scottish Parliament debates Motion of Condolence for Alex Salmond**

**The First Minister, John Swinney, led tributes to the late former First Minister, The Rt Hon Alex Salmond, at Holyrood on Wednesday.**

His remarks were followed by those of all the party leaders before an audience which included Mr Salmond's sister and niece, members of the Alba Party including the acting party leader, Kenny Macaskill, and Mr Salmond's business colleague, Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh.

The flags outside parliament were at half mast while the Motion of Condolence proposed by the First Minister was debated, as they were on Monday when the titan of Scottish politics was buried in Strichen after a private funeral, and on the day he died only a few short weeks ago.

## **CHAMBER DEBATE**

The atmosphere in the Chamber was sombre and dignified, and at times you could hear a pin drop. It was hard not to think of Alex Salmond standing on the front benches when he was First Minister, using all the force of his immense voice with all his acknowledged skills of oratory.

Not all SNP MSPs were present to listen to what the party leaders said, with only around 49 SNP politicians not quite filling the administration benches.

# FIRST MINISTER

The First Minister said that Alex Salmond quickly became a rebel, joining the SNP while studying at St Andrews, and becoming an influential member of the party. He was first elected in 1987 as MP for Banff and Buchan – only one of three SNP MPs at the time. Mr Swinney mentioned that Alex Salmond went on to become a politician for three decades and in two parliaments.

Mr Swinney said that he first met Alex Salmond in 1981 in the SNP club on North St Andrew Street where he had come to speak to a handful of young Scottish nationalists of which he was one. The First Minister said that Salmond was always “a man of independent mind” – a reference to one of his favourite poems.

In one of the first personal recollections we have heard from Mr Swinney, he recalled serving as finance secretary for seven years while Alex Salmond was First Minister. Mr Swinney said that it was a relationship generally defined by the then First Minister “wanting to spend more money than we actually had available, and the Finance Secretary trying to make as many of the First Minister’s wishes happen as was possible”.

He commented: “It was never a relationship without challenging moments, but he did recognise, perhaps reluctantly, that possessing financial credibility was always an advantage in government.”



Ash Regan MSP arriving at the Chamber for the Motion of Condolence about Alex Salmond

## **ALBA PARTY**

Ash Regan, the leader of the Alba Party which Mr Salmond founded, said that she wanted to celebrate the life and legacy of “Scotland’s greatest First Minister” to the country. She said he had awakened the “consciousness of a nation, aspiring us to be bigger”.

She commented that he has left behind a Scotland which is “forever changed, more confident, more assertive, and above all determined to control its own destiny.”

She said that he led the SNP on a journey from the “fringes of politics to the pinnacle of government, making it the dominant force in Scotland”.

Ms Regan said: “His vision gave this nation the confidence that it had long been denied, and his accomplishments in office speak for themselves – including abolishing bridge tolls and prescription charges, eliminating university tuition fees, hosting the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and harnessing Scotland’s green energy potential to position Scotland to take full advantage of the renewable revolution. And, of course, the record breaking Queensferry Crossing.”

She continued: “He took the time to listen to and speak to people all across Scotland, whether he was addressing a crowded village hall or standing before world leaders. He represented Scotland with pride, with dignity and a wit that often disarmed even his staunchest opponents.”

## **Other political comment**

Scottish Conservative Leader, Russell Findlay, said that while he had never met Alex Salmond, he appreciated his flair for

understanding how to grab attention and to make headlines. He concluded that Alex Salmond was a formidable politician who made a “lasting impact on our country” and that there is a place in the history books for him.

Scottish Labour leader, Anas Sarwar explained that his father and Alex Salmond had served at Westminster at the same time. Alex had tried on several occasions to persuade Mr Sarwar senior that his son really ought to ditch the Labour party and join the SNP instead, “demonstrating his bold confidence that allowed him to confound the odds time and time again”.

Patrick Harvie, one of the Co-Leaders of the Scottish Greens, said that it was Alex Salmond who took the SNP from a handful of faces to become the main opposition party. When they were in government “Alex Salmond called it what it was. This might seem simple to say now but he recognised that the office of First Minister is the highest office of Scottish politics and that the group of people who sit on the front bench of this parliament are not merely an administration but a government. He showed his understanding of that by giving the right name to this young political landscape.”

Alex Cole-Hamilton, leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, had not been an MSP during the time that Alex Salmond served at Holyrood, but he said that Mr Salmond was an “unapologetic disruptor”. He commented that his predecessors had to spend a lot of time on preparation when facing up to Alex Salmond.

## **MOTION**

The First Minister’s Motion of Condolence read:

“That the Parliament expresses its shock and sadness at the untimely death of Alex Salmond; offers its deep sympathy and condolences to his family and friends; appreciates the many years of public service that he gave as an MP, MSP, and First Minister of Scotland, and recognises the substantial and

significant contribution that he made over many decades to public life, Scottish and UK politics and the cause of Scottish independence.”