
[out of scope]

From: [redacted - S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>
Sent: Wednesday, November 6, 2024 7:47 PM
To: John Primrose [S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>
Cc: [redacted - S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; [redacted - S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; Russell Bain [S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>
Subject: RE: Trump election

Hi John

[out of scope]

Peter was interviewed for at the weekend – I imagine lots of his takes will be in the below and am sure he'd be happy to expand in a closed setting.

[out of scope]

Thanks
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]

Why Scotland will not be immune from the shock of a Trump victory

3rd November

[NATIONAL GOVERNMENT](#)
[POLITICS](#)

By [Neil Mackay@neilmackay](#) Writer at large

The Herald on Sunday sat down with Professor Peter Jackson, Scotland's leading expert on global security, to hear his analysis of what a Trump win would mean for Scotland, Britain, Europe, America and the world. (Image: *Damian Shields*)

Ahead of the US election, our Writer at Large talks to Professor Peter Jackson about what a second Trump term would mean for America, the [world](#), the UK and Scotland

FROM the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, to the flashpoint of the Taiwan Strait, from the stability of Nato and Europe, to the very future of American democracy itself, a win by Donald Trump in this week's presidential election would reshape the planet – and the governments of the UK and [Scotland](#) won't escape its malign influence.

The Herald on Sunday sat down with Professor Peter Jackson, Scotland's leading expert on global security, to hear his analysis of what a Trump win would mean for Scotland, Britain, Europe, America and the world.

His conclusions are chilling. Jackson holds the chair in global security at Glasgow University, and is the founder and co-director of the Scottish Council on Global Affairs.

“What's at stake is whatever is left of the post-Cold War rules-based international order,” he says.

“Trump and those around him want to completely rewrite the rules and place America in a very different position. Trump's approach to foreign policy is transactional: if I'm doing something for you, what am I getting back?”

“He's not interested in the Holy Grail of American leadership – the US role in the world since the Second World War. He doesn't see that as a benefit.”

Nor is Trump attached to America's “traditional allies”, although during his first term he viewed Britain more favourably. “However, with the new Labour government – especially after this ridiculous nonsense about Labour advisers helping the Kamala Harris campaign – Britain may be lumped in with the rest of Europe's nations as a country which needs brought into line.”

While Trump isn't particularly ideological, those around him are. “The America First people see the golden age of [politics](#) as the 1890s, the era of the robber

barons with very few regulations. They're culture warriors interested in turning the clock back to when there was no talk of women's rights and everyone knew their place in society, and there was a clear hierarchy.

"It's a historical and anachronistic, as the heyday of the white American factory worker was from the mid-Second World War to the late 1970s – but this nostalgia-suffused vision is important to those around Trump."

Trump's assault on a rules-based order "attracts" the "enemies" of the West: China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Jackson isn't saying the current order is perfect. The West has dominated other nations and "broken the rules happily, for example, over Iraq, which in some ways is the original sin undermining the unravelling of the post-Cold War order". However, the post-war world order "did provide a measure of commercial, political and economic stability".

The West's support for Ukraine has been to "defend this order. Trump doesn't see any virtue in this order. He's openly attracted to strong leaders with contempt for rules. He's quite happy to remove the last significant moorings and send us off in a less stable direction".

Ukraine

Trump's threats of "whacking" tariffs on trade with China will destabilise global commerce. "It'll cause not ripples, but waves of instability. Supply relationships and commercial accords between states will be threatened, if not completely undermined. It's unfathomable. It won't be good.

"Britain couldn't have picked a worse time to go out on its own as a global buccaneer. Being closer to the European single market would give us a stable mooring in the storms that are coming should Trump win."

Trump will "try to impose a settlement on President Zelenskyy which will put Ukraine in a very invidious position – the conflict will be frozen with Russia in possession of huge swathes of Ukrainian territory, and Ukraine and its economy devastated and just waiting for the next Russian move to end Ukraine's status as an independent power. A buffer state with a puppet government is probably on the cards if Trump has his way".

Europe isn't in "a position" to replace American support for Ukraine. Trump, who threatened to encourage Putin to attack US allies, also presents a danger to Nato. Though given the power of the US Senate, Jackson thinks it's unlikely he will be able to walk away from the alliance.

“Putin has been hanging on waiting for the election.” There has been Russian interference in the election. The Kremlin is “clearly trying to back a Trump victory”. Ironically, Iran is interfering for a Harris win, and China “is just interested in sowing discord and undermining confidence in America’s political system and democratic processes”.

Jackson notes that Russia has simultaneously been running a campaign of sabotage and assassination across Europe, including plans to murder the head of Germany’s biggest arms company. Tensions and risks are worse than during the Cold War, Jackson says.

However, “in the short-term Russia is in no position to invade” another European nation. Russia would be “in real trouble if it tangled with the Finnish army –even the Polish army”. However, in the long-term “Russia will recover”. It’s then, if America were “on the sidelines” under Trump, that Europe “would have to worry”.

While Trump might be constrained from leaving Nato by Congress, his presidency would certainly undermine “the credibility of Article 5” – the Nato pledge that each member defends the other. “A Trump administration, with so much uncertainty around Article 5 and America’s commitment to fulfil its obligations, might destabilise things in ways that would mean European societies become more militarised and we’d have to give up things we’ve taken for granted.”

Referring to conscription, Jackson speaks of fears for his own children and grandchildren. “These are the things that I f***** worry about,” he adds. “I don’t think people fully understand the consequences of the developments in international security.”

Jackson calls himself a “Cassandra” – the mythical Trojan princess cursed to foretell the future but never be believed.

Scotland

WAR between Russia and Europe “is definitely possible in the medium to long term”. Any war is “probably eight to 12 years” away, but says Jackson, “the threat is very real”. A Harris win, however, might destabilise Putin’s regime, allowing Ukraine to keep fighting, creating anger among ordinary Russians.

Britain would have to “cleave closer to Europe” over defence, security and foreign policy if Trump wins as we’d drift “further away from the special relationship. This would be a major restructuring of Britain’s place in the world away from the transatlantic relationship, which has always given Britain a measure of independence as the bridge to Europe”.

Scotland won't be immune from the shocks of a Trump presidency. SNP policy will find itself under intense scrutiny. Jackson notes that matters would come to a head should support for independence start rising again and there's a push for another referendum. Rising support, he believes, would be predicated on future policy decisions made by a Westminster government upsetting the Scottish electorate.

The SNP has a policy of an independent Scotland joining Nato but also removing Trident. Jackson believes that it would be difficult for an independent Scotland to attain Nato membership if it was intent on removing Trident, due to the instability that would create in the alliance, at a time when Trump is in the White House and there's war in Ukraine. Britain, together with France, provides the only nuclear deterrent on the continent.

Jackson notes that America's "intelligence community and security establishment" are horrified at the prospect of Scottish independence "creating a hole in the fence" when it comes to Nato. Until 2012, the SNP supported leaving Nato, although that's no longer the case.

"The SNP has sorted its Nato problem, but I don't think it's sorted its Trident problems. That would still have to be negotiated and, in the world we're talking about, doing something rash to Britain's nuclear deterrent would be unbelievably irresponsible."

Trident removal would "no question" play into Russian hands. "It would diminish the credibility of Article 5, and that's just the opposite of what we need for European security." Trident removal "would be deeply corrosive to European security".

If US commitment to support European allies under Article 5 were in doubt thanks to a Trump presidency, Scotland removing Trident would increase panic. "An effective and completely operational Trident is hugely important to the UK's force posture and Nato force posture.

"So this is the dilemma that [supporters of] Scottish independence would need to wrestle with. In my view, there are some persuasive arguments for independence but international security probably isn't one of them. Trade, yes. The security of Trident is of fundamental importance."

Independence, he said, cannot be seen to "undermine European security. That's why if you speak to the Lithuanians, Latvians or even the Finns they hate the idea of Scottish independence".

An independent Scotland would be strategically important for security in the Arctic, and the "Five Eyes" intelligence-sharing system. Scotland's geography makes it "absolutely vital for early warning. Scotland has this position that's

more important than people realise in terms of intelligence gathering strategically”.

Jackson added: “Within the wider Holyrood establishment, I don’t think they understand how completely integrated Scotland would need to be in Nato if independence happened.”

Removing Trident if Trump were president would come amid “an international order that will have been weakened, if not be in disarray. It will be a lot less stable than it is now”.

There are diplomats, Jackson says, who “understand the argument for independence, but only still very much as an independent Scotland embedded in Nato”. Scotland’s position in terms of the Arctic impacts US, UK and European security.

The best, most “sane”, policy for the SNP during any future debate on independence is to make Trident removal a “bargaining chip” to help smooth Brexit-style negotiations with London, rather than an immediately achievable aim. Scotland should consider “leasing Faslane in the short-term on the understanding” that Trident would be “relocated” at some point in the future.

Jackson says Russia unquestionably “interfered” in the 2014 referendum. However, since then, Kremlin disinformation operations have become “much more sophisticated” and now incorporate AI. Jackson believes Scotland would experience a “fire hose of disinformation” if there were another referendum, adding: “It’s in Russia’s interest to weaken the UK overall.”

Given that leading figures in the Yes movement have appeared on Russia Today – the Kremlin’s propaganda channel – including former First Minister Alex Salmond who fronted his own show, Jackson noted that from an international perspective “the legacy and the history of the SNP isn’t encouraging”.

Middle east

BEYOND Europe’s boundaries, a Trump win would mean America adopting a “hardline position towards Iran”. While the Biden administration has been “increasingly willing to explore restarting talks about alleviating sanctions in return for credible assurances that Iran won’t weaponise its nuclear capabilities”, under Trump “that will end on day one”. Trump has said he “would resort to any measures to prevent Iran gaining nuclear weapons”.

Jackson says it’s important to watch Iran carefully in the event of a Trump win. Tehran’s national security policy has been to use proxies like Hezbollah, the

Houthis and Hamas – which Jackson labels a “medieval death cult” – as a “first line of defence against possible encroachment or an offensive by Israel”.

However, as “the appalling murders” by Hamas in October 2023 show, “proxies aren’t easy to control”. There are now “elements within Iran’s Revolutionary Guard wanting to go to war with Israel. Watch carefully what Ayatollah Khamenei does in the aftermath of the US election because it could result in the whole region going up in flames”.

That could “send oil prices skyrocketing” especially if Saudi Arabia were drawn into a regional war and its refineries targeted. “It has terrifying possibilities for the world economy.” It’s just one reason why Jackson wants “the Democrats to win”.

Israel would become an even more “important ally to the US than it is at the moment”. Trump would “green light” a continued Israeli war against Hamas and Hezbollah. Jackson says the Biden administration “keeps hitting a brick wall in trying to bring about a ceasefire” as Israeli leader

Benjamin Netanyahu “knows that after the election, Israel might be in a much stronger position and therefore there’s no incentive to agree to a ceasefire”. Trump wouldn’t “put any pressure” on Netanyahu to negotiate. “He would just back Israel and see its campaign as completely serving US interests.”

Jackson noted the irony of some American Muslims backing Trump as they oppose issues like transgender rights. However, it “underlines the importance of the culture wars” for some voters. Many in Trump’s base “yearn for the old days when men were men, women were women, and people had their place”.

He adds: “The culture wars have fundamentally weakened the resolve of Western democracies to stand up for democratic liberties, freedom of the press and freedom of expression – the best things about liberalism. We’ve been weakened partly as we’re open societies and vulnerable to disinformation.” Russian interference has been used to ramp up internal dissent in Western societies around culture war issues.

A Trump win would delight “conservative nationalists” in Europe like Hungary’s authoritarian Viktor Orban, or the far-right AfD in Germany and Marine Le Pen in France. Refugees are already a “target for conservative, nationalist, authoritarian movements in the UK and across Europe... This backlash is transnational”. The networks demonising refugees as “a threat to our way of life” are also transnational. “They’ll be reinforced by a Trump victory, there will be international political consequences.” In America, Trump has promised mass deportations.

Trump's rhetoric matters too. He's called opponents "vermin". Jackson adds: "Trump has tested and eroded the norms of acceptable political discourse and behaviour. It was mimicked in some ways by Boris Johnson. The discourse of the Conservative party would have been unimaginable 20 years ago – the things Suella Braverman or Kemi Badenoch say, weirdly both children of immigrants. But then you only have to look at Latino support for Trump."

Immigration

INCREASED tensions around immigration ramped up by Trump internationally may threaten "European solidarity in the face of Russian challenge. Orban is quite openly pro-Russian, much of the German right is openly pro-Russian.

What we could see if we don't stand up for what we believe in is an erosion of the things that have been central to European political culture since 1945 – what we've fought for – which is liberty and democracy against authoritarianism and autocracy". Europe would be defeating itself "from within".

The impact of a Trump presidency on the climate scares Jackson. He notes that "there's a dynamic between climate degradation driving conflict, famine and migration", adding: "Turning around global climate policy has been agonisingly slow and inefficient." But Trump would "put the brakes on" what small achievements have been made.

"Trump is surrounded by climate sceptics, he's openly critical of sustainable sources of energy." When it comes to the environment and the effects of a Trump presidency, Jackson says: "I'm sadly not optimistic."

Trump could also set an example to other populists regarding less regulation for business and the economy. Jackson notes it was deregulation under Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s which caused "inequality to intensify across the Western world".

The "losers" from Thatcherism and Reaganomics were ordinary workers in Britain and America who saw "their quality of life and prospects so degraded ever since. It just created absolutely fertile ground for Brexit and opportunistic populists like Nigel Farage and Donald Trump, or Boris Johnson. It's so ironic that these are the people who benefited most from deregulation yet they pose as champions of the people who have been f***** over by it".

It feels like "the era of gaslighting" Jackson believes. Trump sees China – unlike Russia – "as a global economic rival and enemy without question".

However, it's unclear if Trump would "be keen to support Taiwan" should China threaten the island.

The policies of President Xi Jinping “are more of an enigma that many of us are willing to admit”, although he has shown “a lot greater willingness to engage in threatening behaviour towards Taiwan. There are a lot of people in Washington who think a war in the Taiwan Straits by 2027 is a distinct possibility”.

Jackson adds: “Even more than a Russian threat to Europe, the greater short-term threat to world peace is in the Taiwan Straits.” Ukraine has “provided a salutary warning about embarking on invasions. Taiwan will fight. Taiwan is the greatest global flashpoint, but I’m not convinced that a Trump administration would consider fighting a war to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Taiwan”. A Chinese invasion would be much more difficult than Russia’s assault on Ukraine as it would be an amphibious attack.

Can the West still consider America an ally if Trump wins? “It won’t be the same kind of ally,” Jackson says. “The credibility of America’s presence and support for European security will be diluted, if not undermined altogether.”

Fascism

US Supreme Court justices picked by Trump during his last period in office have handed the presidency almost unlimited powers without legal consequence. Trump’s team also plans to fire many federal employees and replace them with MAGA loyalists. This is what’s known as Project 2025. There are fears these developments could even allow Trump to pull out of Nato, against the wishes of Congress, and particularly the Senate.

Jackson says this could “begin the process of degradation of fundamental American political institutions, but the judiciary is more than just the Supreme Court. Judicial disputes have to move their way up to the Supreme Court. The Project 2025 idea of just replacing en masse key officials within the machinery of government with loyalists will probably take longer and be more difficult than they understand”.

Jackson says any attempt to “dismantle” the powers of the legislature and the judiciary for “an authoritarian regime to emerge would take time”. One key development to watch for would be any attempt to remove the constitutional prohibition on a president serving more than two terms. That, says Jackson, would show “the direction of travel”. However, Trump would be nearly 85 by the end of any second term and “it looks as if there’s some cognitive decline already. He gets mixed up a lot, although he still has amazing stamina for a man of his age”.

Jackson comes to the question of whether Trump or those around him are fascist. Some of the world’s most eminent historians have branded the MAGA movement fascist, including Yale professor Timothy Snyder, who is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and serves on the US Holocaust Memorial

Museum's Committee on Conscience. The historian Robert Paxton, recognised as the global expert on fascism, has similarly condemned the MAGA movement.

"It comes down to how you understand fascism," says Jackson, who is an expert on extremism in the interwar years. Trump displays some of the "hallmarks of fascism", specifically "authoritarian populism, hostility towards immigration, a tendency to identify minority groups and scapegoat them, attack them and make them a focus for collective animosity".

However, he notes: "One hallmark of fascism that's not there yet is the pursuit of war for its own sake – war as something that's worthwhile because of its invigorating, energising, purifying and cleansing power. I don't see that. So I would probably rate Trump and the MAGA movement as authoritarian populism rather than fascism. For me, a lot of what fascism was about was war as a means of national greatness. The America First agenda is in some ways the opposite of that.

"But not to call him fascist doesn't mean that he's not a massive threat to American democracy and Western democratic principles, processes and institutions. I think he is."

Jackson says that Trump's use of propaganda seems lifted straight from the pages of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. "It's terrifying the extent to which it seems to be a blueprint for the way Trump is campaigning: tell a lie, tell it big, repeat it again and again and again. It doesn't matter how big it is or whether you can prove it or not, just beat people over the head with it repeatedly and it will serve its political purpose."

Jackson accepts that he might be "splitting hairs" in how he defines fascism, but adds: "Trump is as much a danger to liberal democracy as the fascists." He suggests that "fascism might have been a movement of its political time. To say a modern movement is fascist might be a little anachronistic, but there are many smart people like Tim Synder and Bob Paxton – people I admire a lot – who disagree."

Certainly, Trump's politics are "oligarchic", Jackson believes – on the side of the super-rich and prepared to give them vast power over ordinary people. Elon Musk, for example, has been promised a place in a Trump administration. Jackson notes again echoes of America in the 1890s in the agenda of MAGA leaders.

"They want a free hand to unmoor politics from the social policies that emerged over the course of the 20th century so they're not beholden and can make as much money as they want without any responsibility to society. They want to roll back regulation so they have the freedom to behave however they like."

He adds: “Trump might be a fascist or he might not. He might also just want to be able to run America the way he ran his businesses – just firing anyone he wants and saying ‘I want this to happen, I don’t care if it’s illegal, just get it done’ and then go golfing and let someone else worry about implementing it.”

Democracy

THE bottom line is: under a Trump presidency “the consequences for Western liberal democracy – which is already under such strain, and facing systemic global challenges – are terrifying”. Jackson says that rather than fretting about World War Three, the “more imminent danger is the breakdown of democratic consensus in European societies, which was something we saw in the 1930s”.

Although wary of “historical analogies”, the politics of today “resonates with the 1930s” as hostile states like Russia and China want to rewrite the rules by which the world operates, and that creates the risk of war, only this time in a nuclear-armed world.

Is violence inevitable no matter who wins the US election? Jackson notes the Democrats have said they will accept the result if they lose in order for a peaceful transition of power. “But it’s very clear that this is not the view on the other side of the aisle. Whether or not there will be the kind of violence that happened on January 6 [during the attempted Capitol coup] I don’t know.”

Jackson thinks it’s “way more likely” that MAGA members in the House of Representatives and state legislatures will be used “to undermine the election – so there’s a failure to recognise and approve election results all across the United States. That’s probably something we’ll be looking at. If Trump loses there will be lots of litigation, lots of examples of electoral college failure and refusal to certify results.

“That will be fundamentally corrosive to American democracy. That’s probably the big short-term threat – this idea that elections no longer have legitimacy.”

Could democracy itself start to collapse across the West? “I don’t think so,” says Jackson. “As was the case in the 1930s, when there’s an economic crisis and systematic and endemic economic dislocation, it generates a lot of dissatisfaction. But I pray the situation will right itself, I’m an optimist. I think that Trump will lose.”

Jackson adds that there’s much talk of the US polls being inaccurate. However, even if he does lose, “Trump will get at least 80 million votes – and that’s after January 6. It’s just unbelievable, it defies belief that people are willing to risk everything by putting the American political experiment in the hands of this person who has shown himself hostile to democratic institutions and processes”.

From: [redacted S.38(1)(b)] on behalf of CabSecCEAC@gov.scot
To: [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [First Minister](#)
Cc: [redacted - S.38(1)(b)] [redacted - S.38(1)(b)] [redacted - S.38(1)(b)] [Cabinet Secretary for Constitution External Affairs and Culture 2024](#); [redacted S.38(1)(b)]
Subject: RE: Note Verbale
Date: 06 January 2025 15:06:11

Hj [redacted - S.38(1)(b)]

[out of scope]

For the record, [redacted S.38(1)(b)]

they covered nothing in any depth, but touched lightly on topics around the present changes in American politics (with regards to the incoming Trump Administration), latest developments with Elon Musk, the run up to the 2026 Scottish elections and Scottish politics. and then Scottish diaspora work.

[out of scope]

If any more feedback is helpful then happy to have a chat, but they didn't go into depth on anything.

Thanks,
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]

Private Secretary

Office of Angus Robertson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture CabSecCEAC@gov.scot

[out of scope]

SRN – Scotland Working Group

Date:	27/11/2024
Time:	11.00

Attendees:

[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]	DMSL
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]	Mobile UK
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]	BDUK
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]	BDUK
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]	BDUK
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]	Scottish Government
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]	Scottish Government
Apologies	
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]	DMSL
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]	Ofcom
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]	Ofcom
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]	SFT
[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]	SFT

[out of scope]

[out of scope]

Scottish Government (SG)

- The SG is working with Scotrail and Claris Networks to use LEO satellites to trial providing coverage to trains in the north of Scotland. The press release has generated lots of interest, including a share from Elon Musk. The kit is being installed in January followed by testing. They are also doing a trial on Orkney ferries, this trial went live quietly, but public comms will be put out in due course.

[out of scope]

[out of scope]

From: [redacted - S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>
Sent: 09 January 2025 10:41
To: Richard Rollison <[\[redacted - S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; David Barnes <[\[S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>;
Andrew Hogg <[\[S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; [redacted - S.38(1)(b)]
<[\[redacted - S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; [redacted - S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>
Cc: [redacted - S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; [redacted - S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted - S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>
Subject: RE: DITI weekly sitrep OFF SEN

[out of scope]

- Feedback from [redacted - S.38(1)(b)] Wednesday call. UKG looking at cross cutting missions, first was Growth. High level discussion but JP noted Green Freeports as a positive example of how DAs can join up on UK missions. He indicated [redacted - S.38(1)(b)] would pick up on this with [S.38(1)(b)] and that

[redacted - S.38(1)(b)] should be at the table too.

- Elon Musk. Noted the extent to which this issue dominated the Q and A on FM's speech, and referred to the exchanges at PMQs this week [redaction - S.30(b)(ii)]

[out of scope]

From: [redaction s.38(1)(b)]
To: [redaction s.38(1)(b)] [redaction s.38(1)(b)]
Subject: FW: US election results - early advice
Date: 11 November 2024 15:38:56
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

[redaction s.30(b)(ii)] Maybe we can have a look at what's been said
around that, both by President-elect Trump and others (Elon Musk?), [redaction s.30(b)(ii)]
[redaction s.29(1)(a)]

[out of scope]

From: [redaction - S.38(1)(b)] on behalf of [First Minister](#)
To: [Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs 2024; Minister for Victims and Community Safety 2024](#)
Cc: [First Minister](#); [redaction - S.38(1)(b)] [Director for Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights](#);
[redaction - S.38(1)(b)]
[redaction - S.38(1)(b)]
Subject: RE: For information/awareness: Non-crime hate incidents
Date: 19 November 2024 08:10:23

Good morning

The First Minister has noted.

Many thanks,

[redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

Deputy Private Secretary to the First Minister

Office of the First Minister

5th Floor | St Andrews House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG

M: [redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

The First Minister's box closes at 2pm, Monday to Friday. Further details, including preferences, can be found [here](#).

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From: [redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

Sent: 18 November 2024 17:26

To: Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs 2024 ; Minister for Victims and Community Safety 2024

Cc: First Minister ; [redaction - S.38(1)(b)] ; Director for Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights ; [redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

Subject: For information/awareness: Non-crime hate incidents

PO Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs; Minister for Victims and Community Safety

Cc First Minister

For awareness: Non-crime hate incidents

Issue

[redaction - s.30(b)(ii)]

[redaction - s.30(b)(ii)]

Many thanks,
[redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

Subject:FW: For info - BID - DFM - Scotland Tonight (January 6th)

[out of scope]

[out of scope]

From: [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [\[redacted S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)
Sent: 06 January 2025 15:36
To: [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [\[redacted S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot); Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy & Gaelic <DFMCSEG@gov.scot>; [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [\[redacted S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)
Cc: [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [\[redacted S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot); Communications Deputy First Minister, Economy and Gaelic <DFMEG@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>; [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [\[redacted S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot); [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [\[redacted S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot); [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [\[redacted S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot); [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [\[redacted S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot); [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [\[redacted S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot); [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [\[redacted S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot); [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [\[redacted S.38\(1\)\(b\)\]@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot); First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: For info - BID - DFM - Scotland Tonight (January 6th)

Scotland Tonight will ask about:

- Top priorities for 2025
- Budget
- Elon Musk

I will make DFM aware as we are both at Bute House.

[redacted S.38(1)(b)]

From: [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>

Sent: 06 January 2025 15:21

To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy & Gaelic <DFMCSEG@gov.scot>;

[redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>

Cc: [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; Communications Deputy First Minister, Economy and Gaelic <DFMEG@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>;

[redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; [redacted S.38(1)(b)]

[redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; [redacted S.38(1)(b)]

[redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; [redacted S.38(1)(b)]

[redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>

Subject: RE: For info - BID - DFM - Scotland Tonight (January 6th)

PO

Please now see transcript of FM's media huddle.

He was asked about:

- Elon Musk, SG use of x as a platform,
- The Budget / risk of it not passing
- Efficiencies in public spending
- NHS waiting times and the use of AI in the NHS
- Elon Musk, external / international donations
- Social media regulation
- National Care Service
- University funding

Simon Johnson:

You made clear your concerns about the political influence of Elon Musk, but I saw that he did this in a speech which was being live streamed by Scottish Government on X and X obviously being the platform where he propagates all of these views, aren't you sort of helping to drive traffic towards this particular website where more people will see what Elon Musk is having to say on things.

FM:

I've got to get my message across, and I've got to use various means of communication to do so and to engage with people. And I think it's important that I take opportunities such as today to set up what are some of the real choices and challenges that face us, and at the heart of that today is if the budget passes, then I think people will see that the political system can work and act to address the real concerns that members of the public have in our public have in our society today. If the budget doesn't pass, then I think it runs the risk of fuelling the type of sentiments that have

been put to me in the questions that I answered in the play fair library. So that's why I put so much emphasis on this point, and I've got to get that message across to people.

SJ:
Shouldn't be boycotting x if you're really not worried about his influence, well, I'm interested in getting my message across. I've got to reach people.

John Boothman:
Elena Whitham yesterday, condemned Elon Musk on his intervention Jess Phillips this morning, Kier Starmer talking about will be a poisonous influence and said he's crossed the line. Do you agree with that?

FM:
Well, I certainly think that the sort of what I heard and saw been said about Jess, Phillips, I thought, was completely and utterly reprehensible. So I very happy to associate myself with that criticism, and I think also there is a need for us all to be resolute about these issues. That's why I answer questions and we ask them, answer them today. I want the political system to demonstrate people in our country that I think can work to address the issues about which people will definitely consider.

JB:
Are you worried if you go rolling in the mud with Elon Musk, you'll pick up a dirt and mud on the way yourself?

FM:
No, because I'm absolutely straight and candid about what I see different issues. I think that's probably something you've seen from me since I became First Minister. And I'll see it as it is, and I'm seeing the way.

Sev Carrell:
I think the whole process of this speech is predicated on the apparent fear that you have that the budget will fall, but everything that we've that we've heard is the budget will pass. You even acknowledge that towards the end of your speech, we've been told the Lib Dems and the greens, at the very least, have agreed to abstain. There is no real threat to you. This is not 2008 is it? What's What's the issue? Why do you think you were working together to talk about the threat that you know isn't actually real.

FM:
Well, I hope to think it's not real, but it's very simple evidence, if there are 62 members of my parliamentary group, just a minute with that, 62 members of my parliamentary group, just now, you need 65 to have a budget pass. So my Forrester high school elementary arithmetic tells me

SC:
I'm pretty sure respect you don't need lesson 62 to vote against it.

FM:
Well, that's right, but then I don't, I don't know. I don't have any

JB:
you've got something with John Mason ash reading said it was a step in the right direction. Step in the right direction the budget you need. John, it's a lot easier to get your budget through this year than it's been many years.

FM:

So let's take you. Let's take your let's take your numbers there. John, so that's 6464 on a safety vote, the budget falls because that's what happened in 2009 because it ties in the final stage, 6464 the budget fails. Now if people abstain, of course, that makes it easier, but I don't have the certainty. You can't. You cannot say to me today that I've got a signed up commitment from anybody to other SNP members to support the budget. So I've got to map out to people what are the risks that we face, and one of those risks is a budget where we've and I don't want to, I don't want to not properly reflect what's been the thinking about the budget, But I said it upstairs my direction to Shona Robison was to construct a budget that was unifying in its effect, and that is what she has done, if you look the local government. Response to the budget has been certainly not critical, but pretty supportive Scottish retail consortium, when principal business organizations in the country is in the front page of the hearing newspaper this morning saying that MSP should back the budget. So the purpose of the budget to create unity and cohesion in Scottish society is, in my view, succeeding, but it needs to succeed in Parliament, and that's why I need to map out to people, this is not a done deal,

JB:
but when you're confident it's going to pass,

I am confident or past because of that factor, but I can't be certain.

SC:
Why would we here today?

FM:
Because I can't be certain about that. But you are here also to hear my reflections on 2025 which is something you should always look forward to.

Andrew Learmonth:
You said when you were answering questions about Ivan McKee's efficiencies that you had identified saving opportunities in excess of 200 million pounds per annum. But when we had the Tory piece about funding up on, about funding Musk the government from Ivan McKee said that he identified 2 million pounds in savings over the last two years. So I'm just wondering, if I'm talking about the same figures here, is that the same thing, did you mis speak or are we talking about separate?

FM:
We'll check the points that I made. But obviously, if you can produce those efficiencies within an individual financial year, you will get the benefit of those on an ongoing basis, assuming that you continue to sustain those but then that's not the end of it. Andrew, we've got to continue to pursue efficiency within the public sector, and that's very much the mandate that Ivan McKee has from me to do

Paul Hutcheon:
800,000 thousand people are waiting on treatments in Scotland within the NHS – what kind of cut would you like to make that figure by the end of this year?

FM:
Well, I want to set out in the budget statement the commitments that we aimed to make on waiting times, and that's what we're focused on doing. I obviously want to try to achieve as much as possible, because I think that there is, there are opportunities for us to do that by improving the pathways of care that are undertaken, but there will be, as part of the deployment of the resources for the health service, investment in pathways. Let me just call it the kind of golden jubilee elective pathways. It's not the only place that that will be undertaken. We will put much more emphasis on to the increased

delivery of what are now considered to be relatively routine health procedures and through the through the national treatment centre model, and we're working to expand that to make as much impact as we can,

Conor Matchett:

We've heard a lot from Wes Streeting and politicians down south for the last few days And today about large scale reform in the English NHS, you know, things like making sure that patients have the choice of five hospitals as a minimum for treatment the end of the like it or lump NHS approach and building on something that thinks trust Institute taxation attitude, the Scottish solution appears to Just be more money, but more money is leading to worse figures. I mean, just take NHS 24 figures over, over the last few weeks, they've been at their worst for about 15 months. I mean, where is the big swinging solution to this problem at the minute? It's just cash and nothing to show for it.

FM:

Well, the issue about choice, I think, is if I look at the perspective that we're now seeing around the country, where more and more patients are traveling from their locality to other centers to secure treatment earlier than would be the case if they waited in their own locality, which I'm not going to use the characterization of that model, which you're expressing to me, Connor, but essentially, my alternative to that is that you provide pathways that enable people to achieve the Treatment quicker than if they remained in their own mechanic. Now, in the evidence I have available to me, that approach is working because the number of procedures are increasing and anecdotal level when I visited the Golden Jubilee the Golden Jubilee Hospital A few weeks ago and I walked into one the weekends, met a constituent that I know from Tayside, from Perthshire, who was absolutely over the moon at the fact that she was in the Golden Jubilee Hospital getting this procedure done, and it was been done a great deal faster than the prospect of it being done in Tayside and so, and that's not to be critical of anyone. It's to indicate that we've got these pathways that can deliver faster, and that's the that's the direction of travel that we're taking to make sure that we focus on delivering the treatments for individuals.

SJ:

Just follow up on that, because the Prime Minister made a speech on that this morning. We described the NHS as a national money pit, saying is massively inefficient, and you've described space of the potential of AI in particular, to cut waste and to increase productivity. You didn't even mention AI in response to the question from Bruce Cartwright, is that something you're looking at?

FM:

Yeah, and I mentioned AI in relation to the approach that we taking on investment in the economy, because I recognize AI to have the potential to contribute significantly to much of our activity on improving productivity. So these are all tools that we have at our disposal to utilize, and the more utilize. Well, the national money pits description, it's a lot of language I've heard from UK ministers, which make me wince a bit.

David Walker(?):

Certainly the main reasons to cut down the number of quangos, public sector bodies in Scotland. Is this something that's part of your efficiency drive?

FM:

I've never been a great fan of expanding the number of public bodies. I reduced a substantial number of them when I was fan Secretary before over time, lots of reasons come along for different bodies to merge. Indeed, Parliament votes for it half the time, to keep these organizations in place, and some of the same people who are demanding that we reduce the coin goes to the ones that were demanding the quangos. So it's a wee bit of kind of, you know, we should be inviting a tad more consistency from some of the people making their comments. So we'll, we will

be relentless, like focusing on improving the value for money within public finances. That's very much the focus of the work that Ivan McKee is undertaking. But it's also, I should also say, let me not just say it's all Ivan McKee's business, and it is an obligation right across all portfolios. So all ministers have that direction that they've got to push.

CM:

Sorry, just to come back to my question, and I think in answer to Bruce Cartwright, you were asked to provide your solution. What is the solution? Talked about pathways. You talked about your solution to the NHS problem, being at risk doesn't fall
How would you characterize your solution?

FM:

I mean, talking about pathways means nothing to Well, sorry about that. It's about increasing capacity so that we've got more appointments, more procedures, more efficiently delivered across the country. That's my that's my approach. That's what, that's what, that's what am I holding the National Health Service, and if that's your planning on having those indicators that people like the IFS last at the end of last year, and audit Scotland said we're getting worse over the last 12 months. Over the last 12 months to be improving and getting better by the 2026 election, I'm focusing very much on ensuring we've got high performing public services under my leadership. That's exactly what my focus was.

To mention key problem with the NHS access. What are you going to learn those i

FM:

I think it's a combination of things. And I think the fact that demand is much higher as a consequence of the implications of COVID and the implications of people people living longer, which is a good thing, but as people live longer, they have more health complications. So therefore, as a combination of those two things, demand is significantly increased, and that, you know, that's a principal factor that we are wrestling with, with within the National Health Service, and there will also be, at times, challenges about staffing, where we may not be able to deliver all of the staffing component. If you look at the experience over the Christmas and New Year period, we've been dealing with a very significant increase in flu cases as a consequence of that flu does not does
not exempt health care workers. So some health staffing levels have been eroded because of the impact of flu. So you're not able to deliver as much capacity as you would like to deliver because of the effect of significant conditions of that time. So it's a combination of essentially where capacity and demand interact. And sometimes we will face challenges within specialisms about the attraction of the appropriate personnel Brexit factor in all of that, which is well documented. So these are some of the challenges, very large issue, well delayed discharges. I think I'm interested in my speech that delay discharge is a significant factor, but I think my assessment of that is that we have, we probably would have seen a much discharge had we not taken the actions that we've taken to try to reduce that as much as we possibly can do. But then that's also a product of ensuring that we've got a comprehensive social care system in place,

Tom Gordon:

Is public service delivery. What is making some people rip from popular what is making some people ripe for populist and far right? It's not they're not obsessed about the mechanics and the process. They're not obsessed about how the budget process,
They cannot get the services that they want – what responsibility do you take?

FM:

I'm going to fix it.

Gina Davidson:

First Minister, back to your remarks about Elon Musk. You said that you didn't want or believe there should be any difference in Scottish elections from anywhere outside of Scotland. How can you prevent that from happening when it comes to somebody like Musk, and what will you do, maybe, in hand in hand with the UK Government to try and subvert that?

FM:

I think there are issues that I'm going to look at about, what to look at this on a basis of agreement across political parties about some of the questions around about financial contributions, because my view the world today is that an electoral law prevents international or external donations. That's the view I vote just now I've read enough over the course of the last few weeks, it makes me think I wonder how robust that actually is so that's something I'm going to explore. But as I explore it, I will do that open with other political parties, because this should not be a sort of John Swinney SNP thing. This should be a political system, because the electoral law that we have in place has been pretty broadly legislated for in Westminster and in sort of parliament over the number of years. So I generally keep the view it commands confidence across the political system if there is something that or can be avoided in the current ranges, because I start that my response to your questions, you know, I start from the point of view of thinking, Well, I always thought that the system was robust and that external financing possible. But as I say, I've read enough in the course the last few weeks, maybe that's not quite as robust as I feel. So I'm keen to have a closer look at that.

GD:

And financing aside, obviously. He runs X, and we know about the bots that are on there, as reporting found recently, what can the government do about that?

FM:

Well, that's in the space of social media regulation, and I've made it quite clear that I want to, I think, on a whole variety of different fronts, not just about issues in relation to politics. I'm very concerned about issues in relation to social media activity as an American effect for children and other people. So that's a reserved responsibility, I have to say, engagement, in fact, with the United Kingdom Government Secretary has been very briefly, very collaborative. So that's obviously something I'd love to pursue

JB:

In that respect to Tom's question, which was to say, in effect, do you concede that the thing that's driven support for populism and anti-politics parties is the fact that your Government has government today have failed to deliver?

FM:

No what I set out upstairs was, I think a combination of the financial cash, austerity is 14 Year response to that Brexit, which is the stupidest thing that's been undertaken in the United Kingdom in decades, the vision of Ukraine and the resulting spike in electricity prices has all fuelled the sense of difficulty that people face because they are facing cost of living challenges as our public services need investment. So you know, you would all make this comment up. Many of you would all listen to me, ad infinitum during the general election campaign, talking about the need for there to be a substantial injection in public finances because of the difficulties that was that was a call I made with good knowledge of challenges within the public finances. We've taken decisions to increase tax for higher earners, which causes challenges for people. I accept, but it's necessary to invest in public service. Poverty, service and public finances, and of course, the UK government has responded on many of these questions since the election in July. So I think all these factors contribute to the challenges. Lots of years where the government does deliver jobs. So for example, if you're a family living in poverty, their circumstances are better because the actions of my government. If you got children who are involved in early learning and childcare, then you get a better proposition than was the case before. If you're somebody who is going through the cancer

pathway, then on the 31 day target, over 95% of patients are being or just about 95% of patients are being dealt with through that party. So there are many areas where government is delivered. We've delivered more affordable housing per head of population in Scotland than any other part in the United Kingdom over the course of our times. Administration an example of delivering. Yes, there will be challenges, John, of course, there are always challenges

Neil Pooran:

Is the national care service proven to be a stumbling block when reaching a deal with the other parties, and is there any deal that can be reached that will actually include funding for NCS?

FM:

I think the national care service is an issue we're looking at carefully. Obviously, we've got we've got to look at the parliamentary effort of all of that. Neil, I certainly wouldn't want to get into a situation where that became an impediment to us reaching an agreement. And what I think we're all agreeing upon is that have to be good outcomes for individuals to interact with health and social care, and I want to deliver them for as many people as we possibly. As many people as we possibly can.

NP:

How close do you think you are to the deal with any of the other parties?

FM:

Well, contrary to it was been put to me by the revered wise gentleman on my left hand side here, we don't have a deal yet. So my point is that people cannot, people cannot assume this budget will go through. And it's my I think we've put a really good proposition to Parliament., and we're quite happy to reach the discussions, to fund compromise and to get agreement, but people have to be aware, if that doesn't happen, if that agreement isn't reached, and we don't have that agreement today, then the budget doesn't pass, and there are consequences, and I've marked out what they are

TG:

I mean, supposing the budget doesn't pass, in first instance, is Elon Musk going to button his lip? Is he going to stop being Elon Musk?

FM:

At no stage did I say anything of that type. What I said was that if the budget passes and the investment that we're making is able to be deployed, we have more chance of making of building confidence in the effectiveness of our political system. That's my key point.

Andy Phillip:

Just on university funding, obviously, we talk about Dundee University's problems quite a lot in the Courier. Strike action is all but inevitable. People were speaking about January I know there's a rescue package and talks about what to do with it - what about the structural underpinning of the whole university sector, the fee-paying institutions, and reliance on students from abroad, places like like China. What are you talking about with other universities and in government, about making any changes at all to the fundamental structure of how we operate University of Scotland. Or do you think Dundee is just a unique case in bad management?

FM:

You know, the position across Scottish universities and is, in general, very strong. There are examples where it is weakened. The Dundee example has highlighted that quite very graphically. And the Scottish Funding Council, as is appropriate in law, are engaged in supporting the efforts to stabilize Dundee University, to address the issues that are there. In terms of the funding model, the government is absolutely committed to the continuation of the no cheat sheet policy. It is an

absolutely fundamental part of the social contract in Scotland, and the government has resolutely enough time. What we have to do, and we've done it in the budget, is make sure that in terms of government grant, universities are well supported to assist them in their efforts, and I'm confident that we can work to get a financial solution that works for all universities.

CM:

Just one final, very quick one, just to borrow a phrase from one of the predecessors, following on from what you said to Tom, in terms of the fact that you fix the NHS, should we judge you on your record on NHS when it comes to 26,

FM:

I think, I think I'll be judged on many, many questions and tweak the 26 for 18 to pass those judgments, even from harsh critics like yourself. Thank you.

[redacted S.38(1)(b)]

From: [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>

Sent: 06 January 2025 15:03

To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy & Gaelic <DFMCSEG@gov.scot>;

[redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>

Cc: [redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; Communications Deputy First Minister, Economy and Gaelic <DFMEG@gov.scot>; Communications First Minister <CommunicationsFirstMinister@gov.scot>;

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[redacted S.38(1)(b)] [@gov.scot](mailto:[redacted S.38(1)(b)]@gov.scot)>; First Minister <FirstMinister@gov.scot>

Subject: RE: For info - BID - DFM - Scotland Tonight (January 6th)

[redacted S.38(1)(b)]

Please see running issues note as follows. To note the majority of these were running overnight.

DFM will be aware that the Budget and discussion on Elon Musk's involvement in UK politics are prominent in the current news cycle - FM Comms are finalising a transcript of FM's media huddle following the speech this morning, which I'll share as soon as possible.

[out of scope]

Hate Crime Policy Manager
DEIHR – Mainstreaming and Inclusion

From: [redaction - S.38(1)(b)] on behalf of [First Minister](#)
To: [Central Correspondence Unit](#)
Subject: FW: Concerns regarding comments by Former First Minister Humza Yousaf and MP Patrick Harvie having significant implications for Scotland's international reputation and diplomatic relations.
Date: 19 November 2024 10:56:00

CCU

OR re Scotland's international and diplomatic relations. In terms of the two individuals mentioned, neither is a SG Minister anymore, so the response should just refer the correspondent to the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament and to the individuals political parties.

Regards

[redaction - S.38(1)(b)] | [Scottish Government | First Minister's Ministerial Private Office](#)

[5th Floor | St Andrew's House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG](#) | [redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

Please note, I work a part time flexible working pattern over Tuesday-Friday. My mailbox is **not** monitored on a **Monday**.

The First Minister's box closes at 2pm, Monday to Friday. Further details, including preferences, can be found [here](#)

All letters, e-mails and attachments or notes of a Ministerial meeting sent by a Ministerial Private Office to any other official on behalf of a Minister **must be** saved/filed appropriately by the recipient or in the case of replying to another MPO, by a relevant portfolio official from the CC list. Private Offices **do not** keep official records of such e-mails or attachments.

Scottish Ministers, Special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

From: [redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

Sent: 15 November 2024 14:49

To: First Minister

Subject: Concerns regarding comments by Former First Minister Humza Yousaf and MP Patrick Harvie having significant implications for Scotland's international reputation and diplomatic relations.

Dear First Minister John Swinney,

I am writing to express my concern regarding recent comments reportedly made by former First Minister Humza Yousaf, as well as remarks from Scottish Green Party MP Patrick Harvie. Both sets of statements risk stirring up animosity towards the United States and could have significant implications for Scotland's international reputation and diplomatic relations.

First, Mr. Yousaf's comments in relation to Elon Musk, a prominent American figure, could be seen as fomenting division and negativity. These remarks, made by a former First Minister, carry a weight that could potentially damage Scotland's relationship with the United States, a crucial ally. Given Mr. Yousaf's role in advocating for Scotland's hate crime legislation, which sought to address "stirring up hatred," it is troubling that such comments could be viewed as contradictory to these principles, potentially violating the spirit of international human rights laws that protect freedom of expression (Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

Secondly, MP Patrick Harvie's recent comments, made on behalf of the Scottish Government, further heighten these concerns. In referring to the US president as a "misogynist, a climate denier, a fraudster, a conspiracy monger, a racist and a far-right politician," Harvie's words seem to go beyond critique and venture into incitement that could polarize public opinion. By describing the US president in such extreme terms, Harvie risks not only deepening divisions but also undermining the possibility of fruitful diplomatic engagement. His rhetoric, questioning the benefits of Scotland's relationship with the US under such leadership, raises concerns about how Scotland's political leadership is engaging

with the broader international community.

Such inflammatory remarks, both from Mr. Yousaf and Mr. Harvie, risk straining Scotland's ties with one of its most important global partners. Furthermore, these statements could be seen as inconsistent with Scotland's commitment to upholding free speech and fostering international understanding, principles that should guide our approach to diplomacy and public discourse. The spirit of these actions seems to undermine the diplomatic relations we aim to build and the human rights we advocate for, particularly regarding freedom of expression.

I urge you to address this issue and take steps to reaffirm Scotland's commitment to positive international relations, constructive dialogue, and respect for all parties involved. Leadership calls for dialogue that fosters unity, not division, both within Scotland and in our relationship with the world.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I trust that under your leadership, Scotland will continue to champion free expression, human rights, and diplomacy in ways that strengthen our global partnerships and uphold the values we strive to promote.

Yours sincerely,
[redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

From: redaction - S.38(1)(b)
To: [First Minister](#)
Cc: redaction - S.38(1)(b) ; [Communications](#)
[First Minister](#)
Subject: Running issues note
Date: 29 December 2024 10:02:48

PO/FM

Please see below today's running issues note as requested by FM. Spads are sighted.

Please let me know if you require any further information,

Regards,

redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

| Senior media manager | Duty comms

Scottish Government, St Andrew's House

redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

[@gov.scot](#)

Mob: redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

Broadcast and GMS

- A plane has crashed in South Korea killing at least 127 people on board
- Scotland's largest teaching union, the EIS, is calling on ministers to speed up a reverse to the two-cap child benefit
- Air B&B has put restrictions in place to stop people organising unauthorised new year parties

The papers

- The Herald carries an exclusive which says MSP Ash Regan has written to Elon Musk to make the case for a new gigafactory in Scotland
- Sunday National claims Scottish independence is backed by 60% if Nigel Farage becomes PM
- Scotland on Sunday carries an exclusive interview with Pete Wishart who says the SNP needs to reassess how to achieve independence
- Scottish Sunday Mail focusses on a little girl who requires lifesaving heart treatment not available in Scotland
- Sunday Telegraph says middle class families face a £8k increase in their taxes during 2025
- The Mail on Sunday claims Tory leader, Kemi Badenoch, has accused GB News of giving too much time to Reform leader Nigel Farage
- Sunday Times carries an interview with Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson in which she claims the middle class support VAT on private education
- Sunday Express focuses on an aid package for Ukraine

[out of scope]

vaccine'

- The Sun focuses on a TV drama about the Lockerbie bombing and says it could harm the 36-year fight for justice
- Daily Record focusses on a sharp rise in rats in Glasgow City Centre
- The National carries an interview with Jeremy Corbyn which focusses on Trident
- Daily Telegraph carries an interview with Nigel Farage – he claims Elon Musk will help Reform beat the Conservatives

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From: [redaction - S.38(1)(b)]
To: [First Minister](#)
Cc: [redaction - S.38(1)(b)]
Subject: [redaction - S.38(1)(b)] [Communications First Minister; Communications Duty Box](#)
Date: Running issues note - 4th January
04 January 2025 09:26:02

FMPO,

Please find below a running issues note for 4th January. This has been compiled with input of spads.

Thanks,

[redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

Broadcast / Good Morning Scotland

- *NHS reform in England* – Patients in England could be sent for tests, checks and scans without having to see a consultants under new plans aimed at bringing down waiting times. The UK Government has pledged that 92 per of patients will have their procedure within 18 weeks of referral.
- *Weather warnings* – Forecasters warn of disruption as snow sweeps in across Scotland. A Met Office yellow warning comes into force on Sunday and runs until Monday at 12pm. Up to 20cm of snow could fall on higher grounds, there could be treacherous disruption on roads, while rail passengers are advised to check their journeys before travel. Central Scotland, Aberdeenshire, the Highlands, Scottish Borders and Strathclyde are worst affected areas.
- *New Year's Day attack in New Orleans* – UK Foreign Office confirms a UK man was among the 14 people who died. Met Police revealed that Edward Pettifer, 31, from London, was killed as a truck – allegedly driven by a supporter of Islamic State – [was driven into a crowd of people celebrating New Year's day](#).
- *Police investigate sudden death of horses* – Two horses died in a field near Kelso on Boxing Day, with vet tests yet to confirm the cause of death but stable owner Jennifer Wilson believes they were deliberately or accidentally poisoned.
- *Nigel Farage distances himself from Elon Musk* – X owner and Tesla founder Musk has joined calls asking for the release of far-right activist Tommy Robinson, who is serving a sentence for contempt of court.
- *Sales of electric vehicles hit all-time high* – Over two million e-cars were sold in 2024 but it is still short of government targets.

[out of scope]

From: [redaction - S.38(1)(b)]
To: [First Minister](#)
Cc: [Communications First Minister](#); [Communications Duty Box](#);]
[redaction - S.38(1)(b)] [First Minister FMQs](#); [S.38(1)(b)] [Press Transport Scotland](#); [S.38(1)(b)]
[redaction - S.38(1)(b)]
Subject: Running issues note for FM
Date: 05 January 2025 09:19:45

FMPO ,

Please see below a note on running issues in the press this morning and SG lines issued yesterday.

Please get in touch if you require anything further.

Many thanks

[redaction - S.38(1)(b)]

Broadcast headlines

BBC Radio Scotland

Scotland braced for yet more freezing weather.

The leader of Reform, Nigel Farage, has defended Elon Musk after the tech billionaire made a series of inflammatory comments about British politicians.

The First Minister is to urge opposition parties to back his government's budget claiming it offers delivery and hope.

Almost 40% of Scots registered with a dentist have not seen one in two years.

[out of scope]

Programme(s)	STV Scotland Tonight
Date & time	Monday 06 January 2025 22.40
Subject/Interviewee	Discussion – Kate Forbes, Dame Jackie Baillie, and Craig Hoy
Duration	12:58

Colin Mackay, presenter: A big showdown will come as early as next month when MSPs have their crunch vote on the budget plans put forward by the SNP minority government.

It was that budget battle which framed today's set-piece speeches from the First Minister and the leader of Scottish Labour.

John Swinney MSP, Scotland's First Minister: I remain confident that we can secure the passage of the budget. Why? Because we've brought forward a budget that is set in the mainstream of Scottish public opinion. If the budget doesn't pass, then I think we're playing right into the hands of Elon Musk and to other populists. I think we're playing right into their hands because we're demonstrating, or the political system is demonstrating, that it can't address people's day-to-day concerns.

Anas Sarwar MSP, Scottish Labour Leader: He knows he's got the votes to pass the budget, and he knows the budget's going to pass, but all he's doing is trying to play the politics of the budget to look away from the decline. And the challenge we say, look of course we'll engage with the budget in good faith, but what we need to see is that new direction that comes from the budget. Because it's one thing about where the money is spent, but it's also really important how the money is spent. And this SNP government has been passing budgets for 17 years, and things in Scotland continue to get worse and worse and worse. And that's why we need a change of government come 2026.

CM: To discuss the year ahead in politics we brought together three senior politicians: the Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes, Scottish Labour's deputy leader Jackie Baillie, and the Scottish Conservatives finance spokesperson, Craig Hoy.

Thanks all for joining us in this first programme of the year but let's start by hearing your political priorities for 2025. Kate Forbes, you first.

Kate Forbes MSP, Scotland's Deputy First Minister: Well, Happy New Year. Our political priorities are to deliver for the public and to offer hope for the future after a pretty difficult, turbulent few years.

CM: Craig Hoy?

Craig Hoy MSP, Scottish Conservative Finance Spokesperson: I think we need to talk about tax, because the people that I speak to out in the street, in the pub, in my constituency and across the south of Scotland, now believe that they're being taxed more and that the SNP government is delivering less. So we need to talk about tax, and we need to talk about growth, and we need to talk about supporting Scotland's businesses.

CM: Jackie Baillie?

Dame Jackie Baillie MSP: Well, Happy New Year to you and indeed all the viewers. Our political priorities are very clear. We need to offer vision and hope for the future. We know that Scotland's best days lie ahead of it, but at the moment they're being let down by the Scottish Government. We see rising waiting lists in the NHS, we see a failing education system that's going backwards, and we see an economy that's stagnating. That's not good enough. Scotland deserves better.

CM: A big priority early on is going to be the budget. The first vote is on the 4th of February. Kate Forbes, is it in the bag, as Anas Sarwar suggested today, or is it still in the balance?

KF: Well, nothing's in the bag until people vote for it, and we've set out a budget that we believe commands the support of the majority of the Scottish people. We intentionally created a unifying budget, so we took on board suggestions from parties across the chamber so that everybody could get behind it. Just today we see that Save the Children are saying it's a good budget for tackling poverty, Shelter have commended our plan for investing in housing, and the Scottish Retail Consortium have welcomed elements of the budget for business. So it now remains to be seen whether Jackie Baillie and Craig Hoy will be the only ones not to support a budget that does command support across the public.

CM: Well, let's ask them. Jackie Baillie, are you going to back the budget?

JB: Look, this is a complete red herring. John Swinney and Kate Forbes—

CM: Are you going to back the budget?

JB: Let me expand on this. Both John Swinney and Kate Forbes know that their budget has already passed. Why we have this standoff to suggest that people aren't supporting the budget and the ceiling will fall in is just nonsense. It is the worst kept secret in Holyrood that actually the Greens and the Lib Dems are going to abstain. So the SNP's budget goes through. But the key question isn't just the quantum of money because a UK Labour government have given them £5.2 billion, but let me finish the point. It's how they spend it. Nobody in Scotland actually believes the SNP spends money wisely. We've thrown money at things like the NHS; it's not got any better.

KF: If Jackie Baillie votes against this budget, this will be the third time that Labour vote against winter fuel payments for pensioners. If Labour vote against this budget, they are voting against all of the support that Shelter have welcomed—

CM: Hang on, both of you. You're saying they're forecasting what you're going to do. You can tell us. What are you going to do?

JB: Well, I'm not going to tell you just now.

CM: Why not?

JB: We're having discussions.

CM: You're having a go at the budget. You're not going to tell us what you're going to do about the budget.

JB: No, no, no. Let me say I think it is a false dichotomy for John Swinney to say that the world will end if his budget doesn't pass. That's not true. It's also not true that the budget passing is in any doubt whatsoever.

CM: You could clear up any doubt just now by telling us that you're going to vote for it.

JB: Let me say to you, it's not about the quantum of what's in the budget, because we gave them extra money; it's do we trust them to spend it wisely? And you ask people across Scotland and they will tell you different, because their everyday experience is of long waiting lists.

CM: So you can't tell us today whether you're going to vote for or against the budget. Craig Hoy can. You can tell us you're going to vote against it, can't you?

CH: Well, I think it's highly unlikely we could support this budget. We went in to say to the Scottish government they needed to reduce tax on ordinary hard-working Scots to make sure they pass on in full that relief that they got to provide rate support to Scotland's pubs, hospitality, leisure, and retail businesses, which they aren't doing. So I don't think it would be any surprise that we are highly unlikely – it's highly unlikely will vote for this budget. But I think the real concern about this is John Swinney coming out today making some apocalyptic suggestion about what might happen to Scotland if we happen to vote against his budget. I don't know what he's been watching over the course of the Christmas period, but he's clearly been binging on American series like House of Cards if he somehow thinks that some malign forces are going to come in and take over Scotland, if we happen to say this is a bad budget. It's a bad budget and that's why I think it's highly unlikely we'll support it.

CM: When you were in those talks and you said you wanted tax cuts, how much tax did you want cut?

CH: Well, we've said approximately £950 million and that—

CM: But in terms of income tax, how much would that help people?

CH: Well, 2.7 million Scots would pay less in income tax and that would, on average, be £222 per year.

CM: Who would they be, and how much less?

CH: Anybody earning under £43,000 a year in Scotland. Now, the SNP sadly now think that people who are earning £25,000 or £35,000 are rich and have the broadest shoulders and can pay more. That's nurses, that's teachers, and that's the imbalance that Kate Forbes has put into the Scottish tax system. The Scottish Government is no longer the friend of public sector workers who are now paying more in tax. They're no longer the friend of our pubs and restaurants because they've squirrelled away the relief that they're getting to provide rate support so they can spend it on SNP pet projects.

CM: Kate Forbes, both the people here in the studio are saying that you're charging people more and giving them less.

KF: Well, on the contrary; our income tax position has meant that there's an extra £1.5 billion of public funding, and that's what we are using to ensure that our public sector workers, including the nurses that Craig Hoy just talked about, are better paid to ensure that the NHS gets additional funding—

CM: But Craig Hoy says you take it back in tax though.

KF: Well, what we've set out is a fair income tax position where the majority still pay less in Scotland, but we do accept a more progressive and proportionate approach, where those with the broadest shoulders do pay a little bit more, and that means £1.5 billion. But to go back, let's remember what's in this budget. This has got winter fuel payment for pensioners, which it sounds like Jackie Baillie will be voting against. It has got additional—

JB: It's just nonsense.

CH: But not until next year.

CM: Why is it nonsense? Are you going to vote against the budget?

JB: Well, let me say to you: we proposed changes to winter fuel that the SNP could have brought in this year. They could have actually done something this year with the money and resources that they had—

CM: But they're talking about doing it next year and you're going to vote against that, are you?

JB: No, we haven't decided our position in terms of how we're going to vote—

CM: So there's actually no decision whatsoever from Labour on whether they'll back a budget or not?

JB: At the moment we are considering our options, considering whether the budget does enough, but again I come back to the point, it's not just the quantum of money, it's how it's used. I mean, there has been substantial money put into the NHS, and rightly so, but what results have we got for it? What reform is on the agenda? You cannot simply throw money at the problem and expect it to get better. You need reform accompanying that investment, and the SNPs simply do not want to or do not know how to do that.

KF: So we were all listening very carefully to Anas Sarwar today to hear about his big ideas for reform, the only idea we heard was shutting down the enterprise agencies, which have, in the last year alone—

JB: I'm sorry. That's just a mischaracterisation of what went on.

KF: —delivered just over £2 billion in additional investment.

CM: Hang on, Kate Forbes, hang on a sec. Briefly, Jackie, then we'll come to you, Craig.

JB: What we're highlighting is the need for change in education, in the NHS, in enterprise—

CM: But he was also talking about rationalising the enterprise sector, wasn't he?

JB: —right the way across the board. What we're talking about is a government at the moment, the SNP, which is more interested in itself than it is in delivering for the people of Scotland. That's why we've got 131 quangos more than MSPs.

CH: I think what we're hearing here are two failing Governments—

JB: That's just nonsense.

CH: —who are arguing about who is letting down Scotland the most. It's quite clear that since Labour came to power, they have badly let down Scotland. They have badly let down—

JB: We've had 14 years of a Tory government that devastated Scotland.

CH: Jackie, they have badly let down Scotland's pensions—

JB: And whilst I will support winter fuel allowance changes that put money back into people's pockets, I also expect the Scottish Government to spend the money they've got. We've seen whom efficiency improvement budgets actually underspent, not just this year, but year after year after year. That money could have been used to invest in—

[All talking]

CM: Craig Hoy come in. Hang on, Kate Forbes. Let Craig Hoy come in.

CH: Let's talk about trust in politics. Where was it in your manifesto that you were going to strip Scottish pensioners of their winter fuel payment?

CM: On that point – answer his point then now, then I'll move on.

JB: I have to say that after 14 years of the Conservatives, I will take no lessons—

[All talking]

JB: —I will take no lessons from Craig Hoy about what is appropriate or not.

KF: But you can vote to introduce it in a few weeks' time and we'll all be watching.

CM: Given what we've heard today from Elon Musk, for example, and the First Minister calling him out and the Prime Minister calling him out on it, the First Minister was suggesting that if the budget doesn't get passed, that's a gift to Elon Musk today, Kate Forbes.

KF: Well, I think he's saying something a bit deeper than that, which is that populism flourishes when politicians or politics fail to deliver.

CM: Anas Sarwar says you're a populist party.

KF: Well, when politicians and politics fail to deliver. And I actually think that Jackie Baillie, Craig Hoy, and I have the same moral duty to ensure that we do stand against the extremes of populism and that we are ensuring that our politics works for the people. Now, we know what the people's priorities are. They want the NHS to function well. They want to see the economy grow. They want to see us tackling climate change. And they want to do that through a well-resourced public sector.

CM: Craig Hoy?

CH: But the First Minister today said that he wanted to give Scots hope. He's been in power for 18 years and I think, Colin, Scots do have hope. They have a hope that this rotten SNP government will be run out of office next year.

CM: That's a long way to wait though, isn't it? 2026. I say this is the start of the election campaign, isn't it?

CH: It's not necessarily the start of the election campaign but it is an opportunity to set out our stalls and that's why we're saying we want common sense proposals to reduce tax, reduce the burden on business, and why? Because that will deliver growth to the Scottish economy, which is something that's sadly absent under Kate Forbes.

JB: We think the Scottish people deserve better than they're currently getting. People tell me all the time that they're paying more, they're getting less. Everybody knows somebody who is on a hospital waiting list for treatment or for diagnosis. The system is not good enough. The SNP have proved they are currently incompetent as a government, unable to deliver. It really is time for a new direction for the people of Scotland.

CM: Welcome to 2025 and the start of the 2026 election campaign. Thank you all for joining us in Scotland Tonight.

CH: Thank you and Happy New Year.

KF: Thanks.

Ends

Programme(s)	BBC Radio Scotland Good Morning Scotland
Date & time	Monday 06 December 2024 8.07
Subject/Interviewee	Interview – Russell Findlay
Duration	12:47

Gary Robertson, presenter: Let's kick off with the Scottish Conservatives. Their leader, Russell Findlay, is here with us now. Good morning to you.

Russell Findlay MSP, Scottish Conservatives Leader: Good morning. Happy New Year.

GR: And to you too. You're relatively new in the job. Professor John Curtice told us a little earlier you need to get noticed by the public when he's looking at your polling numbers.

RF: Well, here I am.

GR: Well, indeed. So how are you going to do that this year?

RF: Well, it's been 101 days in the job, and we've had 18 years of damaging and divisive SNP rule. And it's my job to do whatever I can to show the people of Scotland that we are the only meaningful alternative to the stale socialist consensus, a left-wing consensus at Holyrood. We believe in lower taxes. We believe in allowing people to keep more of the money that they earn, and we will stand up for that unashamedly.

GR: Will you back John Swinney's budget?

RF: Well, we've attempted to engage with Mr Swinney and myself and my colleague Craig Hoy, who's our Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Finance, and we've put forward a range of proposals that would lead to reducing the tax burden on hard-working Scots, on businesses, and to help homebuyers, but these have been pretty much—

GR: What would that mean for public services?

RF: —pretty much rejected.

GR: Well, possibly rejected because the argument is that if you cut taxes, public services will suffer.

RF: We disagree. You cannot tax your way to economic growth. That's basic stuff. Both John Swinney and all the other parties at Holyrood, apart from the Scottish Conservatives, believe – we are the only party that believes in lowering taxation, lowering the tax burden on hardworking Scots.

GR: At a time, obviously, when it's right to do so, the Scottish Government would argue that it's not the time at this moment. John Swinney says that—

RF: It's never been the time in 18 years.

GR: Well, John Swinney says if you don't back his budget, you're feeding populism.

RF: I mean, that's just preposterous, absolutely preposterous. We believe in cutting taxes responsibly. We believe that people who earn – work hard to earn for their families should keep as much of that money as possible. This is not radical stuff. This is actually responsible and sensible, and most people agree with that.

GR: But in terms of what else is in the budget, the government again would point to the moves to end the two-child benefit cap to restore the winter fuel payments. Are these measures that the Tories come back?

RF: Well, the Scottish government this year are in receipt of almost £3.5 billion extra in the block grant, the benefits bill in Scotland is going to almost double to over £8 billion a year. It's unsustainable and it's only proper that we show the people of Scotland that we get that. We understand that cutting taxes actually grows the economy and increases the tax take.

GR: So, you don't back the ending of the two-child benefit cap, you don't back the restoration of the winter fuel payment?

RF: Well, there's, all these things are to be discussed. We've—

GR: Well, they're in the budget, so you need to have a plan on this now, don't you?

RF: There are many things in the budget that we might agree with, and many things we don't agree with.

GR: So, it's all about tax as far as you're concerned. If it doesn't have tax cuts, then you will not back it.

RF: If John Swinney, who's been in charge for 18 years and who has caused this economic damage to Scotland in that time, isn't willing to discuss the premise of cutting taxes, then I don't know where we go from there.

GR: But you are saying I'm willing to discuss the premise of restoring the winter fuel payments. People are cold at the moment, and that has been taken away from them.

RF: We have obviously opposed – it was a UK Conservative government that maintained the winter fuel payments for 14 years, and Keir Starmer lied to the public, said that these would not be removed, and he did so without any form of assessment or risk assessment. By Labour's own calculations, this will result in the death of thousands of pensioners. We believe that's highly irresponsible, and of course we oppose that.

GR: So, you would restore it then?

RF: Yes, we would.

GR: So, you would back the budget, potentially, to restore it?

RF: There are many things in the budget that we oppose. It's in its entirety, it's not about one individual thing.

GR: Of course, one person who thought that the winter fuel payment was not sustainable was Kemi Badenoch. She said as much when she was in government.

RF: Well, that may be so. I mean, if we ended up in a position where that needed looked at in terms of whether some form of assessment and means testing needed to be applied, that seems reasonable. We're not opposed to that, but the way in which it was done is going to result in the death of pensioners due to the winter weather that's coming our way right now.

GR: So, what is your... what policy would you bring forward to mitigate that then, to fix that situation?

RF: Well, we've said we oppose the scrapping of the way it was done. We would, however, look at that if necessary. We would be quite happy to look at that as part of the bigger picture as to what of the universal benefits should be maintained and which should not.

GR: So, when we talk about what you're going to do this year, how you're going to get noticed, are we actually going to start hearing policy from you? Might this be a policy that we get from your party?

RF: We put forward policy all the time. Our 2021 manifesto, for example, was—

GR: But you're the new leader. You're just backing the—

RF: No, no, I'm just—

GR: You're just backing Douglas Ross's policies.

RF: I'm making the point that as a party, we put forward policies frequently and we'll continue to do so. But fundamentally we are the only party in Holyrood that is opposed to this cosy left-wing consensus that is damaging Scotland. We've had 25 years of it with devolution and there is an alternative. I firmly believe that.

GR: And what does the left-wing consensus mean in this case? Is it just about tax?

RF: You have parties who – well, there's very little difference in terms of other policies too. More often than not, it's only the Scottish Conservatives that are asking the tough questions, both at Criminal Justice Committee where I served, or many other committees, or within the Chamber. We are the party that stands up to the government and some of their most ridiculous proposals such as the Gender Self ID farce. So, it's not just about taxes; it's about all matters that go through that parliament, and we understand what matters to the people of Scotland, and we'll stand up for their interests.

RF: So will we get new policies from you this year or is it a case of, because you've pointed there to the 2021 manifesto, just more of the same from the—

GR: Well, of course, there'll be new policies, but what we're doing right now is in trying to engage in the budget process. That's the live issue. It's due to pass within the next few weeks, or due to be voted on in the next few weeks, in all likelihood. Despite this pretend dance that John Swinney's doing, talking about populism, and talking about people not

voting for it, we know – and he knows, and your listeners know – that this is... he's going to throw a bone to the likes of the Lib Dems, the Greens, and perhaps even Labour, who will back it.

GR: But your party, of course, backed SNP budgets in the past. The public might want some consensus here.

RF: Wait a minute, I'm getting a hard time from the 2021 manifesto, but you're now going back about 15 years.

GR: But that's when, but the public perhaps want some consensus here, don't they?

RF: Well, yes, that's why we – I mean, I wrote to John Swinney twice. He doesn't answer my letters; he doesn't take my calls. My colleague, Craig Hoy, has sat down with the Finance Secretary and attempted to put forward what we are proposing, which is very serious and credible and fully costed plans to reduce the tax burden on hardworking Scots.

GR: How close are you to the Conservative leader at Westminster, Kemi Badenoch? Is she a vote winner for you in Scotland?

RF: I believe she is, yes.

GR: In what way?

RF: Well, she's a credible, authentic voice who, I think, is a bit like me. She's been in the job for even less time than I have. Her job is as much to get noticed, as you put it at the outset, and to come forward with credible policies showing that we are a meaningful alternative. And that's what we'll do – we'll work hand in hand to do so. She'll have her job at the UK level, and I'll have my job with a very imminent election for Holyrood in 2026.

GR: And is her call for an inquiry into grooming gangs credible, given that she was, of course, in the government – she was Women and Equalities Minister under Rishi Sunak – when he only promised to deliver some of the Alexis Jay inquiry recommendations rather than all of them?

RF: I think it's important that the voices of all these victims are properly heard, and I think that the right way to do so is through a meaningful, independent, statutory inquiry. But this is a UK issue.

GR: Well, why was that not set up by Rishi Sunak and Kemi Badenoch? Why didn't we hear from her when she was Women and Equalities Minister?

RF: I'll tell you what I'd much rather talk about, which is in exactly the same territory, is the Scottish child abuse inquiry, which has closed its door to the victims of industrial-scale abuse in Scottish football, and which has closed its door to victims of abuse by members of the legal fraternity. I've campaigned long and hard to ensure that an existing inquiry in Scotland broadens its scope so that those victims are heard, just as I believe that the UK should also have an inquiry to hear what happened in Rotherham and Oldham and places like that.

GR: Well, you're pointing to what you would see as a consistent position on that. My point to you is that Kemi Badenoch doesn't have a consistent position when it comes to these grooming gangs. She sat in the government and said nothing.

RF: Well, situations evolve, and more information comes to light—

GR: Well, what has changed in this circumstance is that Elon Musk has started talking about it. So, is it time to back what Elon Musk says when it comes to UK politics?

RF: It's entirely right. This is not to do with Elon Musk. This is to do with the fact more information is emerging from victims, more information is coming forward about why certain decisions were taken by prosecutors or why certain decisions were taken by social workers. And I think it's entirely right that that is subject to full, independent scrutiny.

GR: Is Elon Musk a force for good?

RF: In the world?

GR: Wherever.

RF: I think he's a force for good in terms of his business acumen, what he's doing with space. I think his involvement in UK politics is more entertaining than enlightening.

GR: Well, you've said that we could do with somebody like Elon Musk in Scottish politics, haven't you?

RF: Well, I think you're taking that slightly out of context. That was specifically to do with government waste, which the SNP are masters at. There's gargantuan government waste in Scotland, and if you took a business figure in Scotland and planted them into St Andrews House in the course of a morning, I reckon they could find many millions of pounds' worth of savings.

GR: So that's the only area you agree with Elon Musk? You wouldn't throw your hat into the ring with other stuff that he's saying, because Kemi Badenoch seems to be riding on his coattails.

RF: What other stuff?

GR: Well, I just mentioned there, the child grooming stuff, for instance.

RF: Well, I've said that the Scottish child abuse inquiry should broaden its remit. I think victims of abuse in Scotland should be heard. I don't think that's controversial.

GR: Of course, Elon Musk has fallen out, it seems, with Nigel Farage of Reform UK. They're doing pretty well in the polls, it seems, at the moment, even without Elon Musk's cash, which he's talked about giving at some point. How much of a threat is Reform UK to your party?

RF: Well, my job, having been in it for only 101 days, is to reunite the party, rebuild the party, and show the people of Scotland that we are the only meaningful alternative. I understand why people might have been tempted by Reform in some recent by-elections. People are frustrated, people are sickened by politics and politicians. There's a lack of trust, a lack of faith, and I think, as me not being a career politician, I think I understand that, and I think it's my job to re-engage with people and show them the Scottish Conservatives are the true, meaningful alternative.

GR: Well, it's not just about by-elections, because Reform won 7% of the vote in the general election, overtook your party in 25 seats. You lost 16 deposits in that election; Reform only lost 10.

RF: Yes, there's no doubt that the Conservatives across the United Kingdom had a very bad day, but in Scotland, we could certainly take some comfort from the fact that we kept five of our six MPs.

GR: Do you understand their appeal, Reform's appeal?

RF: I understand why people are perhaps attracted by Reform, but what I don't understand is what exactly Reform, especially in Scotland, stands for. Many of their candidates believe in breaking up the United Kingdom. Are they nationalists or are they unionists? There are other unsavoury characters who, as emerged, have been heavily involved with the party. They don't have a leader in Scotland. They've got no policies whatsoever. And they are—

GR: And yet, as we heard earlier, 11% in the opinion polls – John Curtice was telling us earlier. How do you counter that?

RF: Well, I think if you look back at when I took this job, we were... our numbers have improved. There's obviously no room for complacency. It's about getting out there, as we're doing today, and showing the people of Scotland that we have a plan to improve lives for people in Scotland, to reduce the tax burden, to grow the economy.

GR: Well, we'll talk again many times, I'm sure, over the coming year. Thank you very much indeed for coming and speaking to us. That is leader of the Scottish Conservatives, Russell Findlay.

Ends

Ministerial meeting with Peter Kyle MP, UK Secretary of State for Science, Innovation & Technology

Date and time	
Where	
Who	
Key purpose or message	[out of scope]
Top facts/ figures	

Sensitivities	[out of scope]
Official support	
Briefing Contents	

[out of scope]

AI Regulation

[out of scope]

United States

- President-elect Trump has vowed to rescind President Biden's 2023 Executive Order on AI, which was the US Government's first attempt to provide a Federal framework for AI. Elon Musk donated £100m to Trump's campaign and is expected to play a major role in the new administration, including through a new Department of Government Efficiency, alongside other tech and AI figures. Meta announced on 8 January that they will scale down fact-checking on Facebook, and "censorship" of topics such as race and gender, as a result of the new administration's emphasis on "free speech".

Annex D - Biographies



Peter Kyle, MP SoS Science, Innovation, Technology

Peter Kyle was appointed Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology on 5 July 2024. He was elected as the MP for Hove and Portslade in July 2024.



Matt Clifford, Tech entrepreneur and the Chair of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA).

In the spring of 2023, he helped design the [Frontier AI Task Force](#), a government body, modeled on the UK's Vaccine Task Force, to lead AI safety research. The new agency, which later became the AI Safety Institute, was the first of its kind, and has since been emulated by the US, Singapore, and Japan.