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29 Jan 2020



The SNP has been accused of embarrassing the Scottish Parliament by ensuring a key parliamentary day has been dominated by “pointless” debates.

MSPs were forced to talk about whether or not to fly a flag on the pavement outside Holyrood today, before the First Minister led yet another debate about independence.

That’s despite a range of domestic challenges, including a crisis in the NHS, plunging standards in Scotland’s schools and a funding fiasco for the country’s police force.

The Scottish Conservatives were even told ministers couldn’t make an urgent statement on policing today because there was no time in the parliamentary calendar.

The party have also blasted the SNP for attempting to overrule the Scottish Parliament’s Corporate Body – an organisation which is meant to politically independent – for the first time in Holyrood’s history.

Scottish Conservative chief whip Maurice Golden said:

“The SNP has ensured a day of embarrassment for the Scottish Parliament.

“What must the rest of the world think when they see the party of government ensuring crucial parliamentary time is abused in this way?

“Major devolved portfolios like health, education and justice have descended into crisis under 13 years of SNP rule.

“We should be using this time to talk about how to get badly-delayed hospitals open, how to raise standards in schools and how to protect the number of police officers patrolling the streets.

“Instead, the day has been dominated by the nationalists’ childish hobby horses.

“Together with the subservient Greens, the behaviour by the SNP on these issues – from the First Minister down – has been a complete disgrace.”