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- Swinney claims North Sea oil was merely an independence 'bonus'

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Oil was never the basis for the Scottish economy, but merely a bonus, the Deputy First Minister claimed today.

The admission exposes a split at the top of the SNP in the same week its top financial adviser Andrew Wilson said the complete opposite, and that the nationalists had depended on oil revenues for their financial projections.

Today at First Minister's Questions, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson challenged Mr Swinney – who was standing in for Nicola Sturgeon – on the contradiction.

However, he refused to explain the differences in opinion, and also dodged the issue of a fresh SNP drive for separation.

It was reported this morning that Nicola Sturgeon regards the autumn of 2018 as the "common sense" time for a referendum re-run.

This is despite repeated polls showing people don't want it, and little movement in polls Ms Sturgeon said would need to shift significantly before she called another referendum.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"It may have been a new face in the First Minister's seat, but the bluster was the same as ever.

"We now have a very stark contradiction at the heart of the SNP.

"Its chief financial adviser says oil was the basis on which a separate Scotland would have been built.

"But the Deputy First Minister says it was merely planned as a bonus.

"They can't both be right, and this contradiction exposes that the entire economic prospectus on which the SNP based its case for independence was bogus.

"Nicola Sturgeon thinks it's 'common sense' to have another divisive and unwanted referendum next year.

“But most Scots don’t want to go back to that division and uncertainty, and most think this irresponsible talk will only damage Scotland’s economy further.

“That’s the kind of common sense the SNP should be deploying.”

SNP strategy chief Andrew Wilson said oil was in fact the “basis” for his party’s independence plans in 2014. This is despite John Swinney previously saying it wasn’t the basis, but “a bonus”:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/03/never-mind-indyref2-snp-must-own-up-to-the-lies-of-indyref1/>

Nicola Sturgeon said today 2018 would be the “common sense” time for another referendum:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/09/nicola-sturgeon-autumn-2018-common-sense-time-second-independence/>