Labour in the Scottish Parliament
Friday 1st February 2008

PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

ALEXANDER MAKES VOLUNTARY REPORT TO REGISTER OF MEMBERS INTERESTS
In light of an opinion received from the Scottish Parliamentary Standards Commissioner, Wendy Alexander MSP is today making a voluntary report of all donations received by her leadership campaign team above the Parliament’s £520 threshold.

Wendy Alexander had at the time sought the advice of the clerks to the Standards and Public Appointments Committee, as recommended by the relevant guidance. The Clerks' advice was that “this does not require to be registered”. The Standards Commissioner has now conveyed to Wendy Alexander that, in his opinion, the advice received by her from the Clerks was incorrect. This decision, taken it is understood upon the basis of careful consideration and the opinion of a QC, also contradicts the understanding widely held in the Scottish Parliament that it is not necessary for there to be double recording both with the Electoral Commission and in the Register of Members Interests for internal party elections.

WENDY ALEXANDER MSP, commenting on the decision, said:
“I have always been clear that I wanted all donations given to the campaign to be recorded fully within the rules. That is why in early November I voluntarily registered all my donations with the Electoral Commission and, in accordance with the guidance, I approached the Standards Clerks, who confirmed my understanding that it was not necessary also to register the donations in the Register of Members' Interests.

“The Standards Clerks also confirmed to me that none of the eight other MSPs who had been involved in previous internal leadership elections had made any submissions to the Register.

“In light of the Commissioner’s opinion, conveyed to me yesterday, and in the interests of transparency, I am today making a voluntary registration of the relevant donations. I am grateful to the donors concerned for their consent in allowing me to do so.
“It is also appropriate that this decision is drawn to the attention of colleagues from all parties who have previously been involved in internal elections, but have not I understand registered donations to their election campaigns. It is important that the position is now clarified. It is not in the interests of Scottish politics or the public that this gives rise to a further raft of formal complaints or investigations and so I call upon previous party election candidates, Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Nicola Sturgeon MSP, Fergus Ewing MSP, Christine Grahame MSP, Annabel Goldie MSP, Nicol Stephen MSP and Mike Rumbles MSP to also now consider identifying and registering any donations they received but did not report during their campaigns in the last Parliament.

"I would like to place on the record my thanks to all supporters of my leadership campaign. I will continue to do the job they trusted me to do, standing up for Scotland and leading Labour in the Scottish Parliament."

ENDS

Notes To Editors:
The current reporting threshold of £520 for the Register of Members Interests is set by the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 Act.. The threshold was previously £250, which was the threshold applicable for previous internal party election campaigns during the last Parliament.

Wendy Alexander was not involved in day-to-day fundraising – the campaign team were responsible for sourcing donations – and all donations were paid into a campaign account, rather than directly to the candidate. Yesterday, the Commissioner offered his opinion that such donations did in principle constitute registrable gifts.

This decision, taken it is understood upon the basis of careful consideration and the opinion of a QC, contradicts advice given to Wendy Alexander on November 8 2007 by the Clerk to the Standards and Public Appointments Committee of the Scottish Parliament, who advised that the donations did not require to be registered under either gifts or election expenses.

Wendy Alexander was made aware yesterday evening (Thursday 31 January 2008) of the opinion of the Parliamentary Standards Commissioner, Dr Dyer, and sought to take immediate action, registering the relevant donations today. Dr Dyer has not yet
concluded his investigation and it would therefore be inappropriate to comment further on the opinion received in the meantime.

Roseanna Cunninghame MSP, Nicola Sturgeon, Fergus Ewing MSP, Christine Grahame MSP, Annabel Goldie MSP, Nicol Stephen MSP and Mike Rumbles MSP all stood in internal leadership or deputy leadership elections during the last parliament but no public declaration of any donations they received was made to the Register of Members’ Interests in their campaigns.

At the time of the SNP, Scottish Liberal Democrat and Scottish Conservatives leadership elections, and the SNP’s deputy leadership elections, during the 2003-2007 Scottish Parliament, the Register of Members Interests’ reporting threshold was then £250. There were no RMI declarations published relating to any MSP who was a candidate in these campaigns, despite some of them being nation wide, closely contested all member ballots with manifestos and literature sent across Scotland and lasting more than 10 weeks in one case.

The voluntary declaration submitted by Wendy Alexander today:
Voluntary Declaration for RMI under “Gifts”
During my campaign for the leadership of the Scottish Labour Party, my campaign received a number of donations, ten of which were for amounts over £520. On 8th Nov, the day following my campaign team’s submission of a voluntary return to the Electoral Commission I sought advice from the Clerk to the Standards Committee on possible RMI reporting requirements. I was advised that these did not require to be registered. On 31st Jan 08 the Standards Commissioner indicated to me his opinion that this advice was erroneous. Although I am satisfied that these donations did not prejudice my ability to participate in proceedings in Parliament in a disinterested manner, I have, in the interests of transparency, obtained the consent of the donors to make a voluntary entry.

Donor Value
GMB Scotland £999
Michael D Rutterford £999
Neil Davidson £995
Nicholas Kuenssberg £995
John Lyons £995
Phoenix Car Company £995
Strathvale Holdings Limited £995
City Refrigeration Holdings Limited £995
David J Pitt Watson £990
Paul Green* £950
* forfeited to the Electoral Commission on 3 December 2007
All cheques were banked between 31st August and 5th Nov 2007