

September 2021 NEWSLETTER



Linlithgow & East Falkirk Constituency

Welcome

... it's been a busy time since returning to Westminster from Summer Recess. In just 2 weeks I've voted in 18 Divisions relating to important issues like Universal Credit (UC), National Insurance, the Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Bill, and the uprating of Social Security Benefits. I've also questioned the UK Government (UKG) about the adequacy of UC, the cancelling of a Scottish contract to produce vaccines, and a Commonwealth visa for former armed forces personnel. More detail follows on a Real Fur Sales debate I summed up on, and a follow-up on the Motor Neurone Disease (MND) debate I led before recess.

Westminster Update

Real Fur Sales in the UK

On the 14th of September I aligned with cross-party Members in the House of Commons, to call for a complete ban on fur imports. The caption in this picture sums up my own attitude to fur sales as fur farming all too often leads to unacceptable and cruel conditions for animals. Investigations have shown that the physical and mental abuse suffered by animals kept in barbaric conditions, which the industry professes to be humane, include the use of leg-hold traps and keeping animals in 1 metre square cages for their entire lives. Their deaths are equally horrific, with animals being beaten to death or even skinned alive. This flies in the face of steps the Scottish Government (SG) is taking to strengthen animal welfare legislation in its programme for government.



"I just dinnae like it"

Fur imports in the UK are currently a reserved matter and I believe it is incumbent on the UKG to introduce a ban on the import of fur products ... a view that I know many of my constituents share. Indeed, several polls in recent years have shown a ban on fur imports would get overwhelming public support.

Because of its related cruelty and suffering fur farming across the UK was banned in 2003 - a world leading move. However, with the equivalent of fur from around two million animals being imported to the UK each year, the UKG continue to be guilty by proxy of that cruelty and suffering.

The UKG responded to an e-petition that called for a fur import ban 3 years ago saying that such a ban was unlikely while Britain was a member of the EU. So, what's its excuse now? The normal powers of independence would let us act for ourselves in this matter.



Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Debate

Last time, I updated you on a debate I led on increased and targeted research funding for MND. Campaigns like this require a sustained push. MND is a fatal, rapidly progressing disease that affects the brain and spinal cord. It attacks the nerves controlling movement so that muscles no longer work, but it does not usually affect the senses, such as sight. As a result, it can leave people locked in a failing body, unable to move, talk and finally breathe. It affects people from all communities, killing a third of people within a year, and more than half within two years, of diagnosis. A person's lifetime risk of developing

MND is around 1 in 300. Six people per day are diagnosed with MND in the UK and the same number die from it. That is why former Rugby League legend, Rob Burrow, joined fellow sufferers on the 21st of September to deliver a letter to No. 10, calling for £50 million of government funding for targeted MND research. The call comes from a coalition of MND charities (the MND Association, MND Scotland and My Name's Dobbie Foundation), people living with MND, and leading neurologists. The letter starkly states "MND is a death sentence. We will all die of the disease because there are no treatments to help us."

To show my support I met the delegation on the final stage of their journey to Downing Street and here I am pictured with Chris James, the MND Association's Director of External Affairs. I took the opportunity on the same day to raise a Topical Question with the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Secretary, asking him to commit to the charities' spending review bid.

For more information about the campaign visit www.mndassociation.org/unitedtoendMND

Active in the constituency

Second Independence Referendum Timeline

There's been questions about the anticipated timeline and plan for #indyref2, so I thought a few lines on this would be helpful.

Covid permitting, holding a 2nd referendum on independence within the duration of the first half of the Scottish Parliament (SP) was an SNP manifesto commitment in elections to the SP earlier this year. The SNP has entered into a historic cooperation agreement with the Scottish Greens, which seeks to promote a green, fair and independent alternative at the heart of governance within Scotland. Through this, there is an official majority among SNP and Scottish Green MSPs in Holyrood for a second independence referendum to be held, when safe to do so.

Once there's been an official vote and MSPs decide prospective outcomes it's inconceivable that Boris Johnson can unilaterally deny us our say in the constitutional affairs of our country. If the Tories take this anti-democratic route, the SG will legally challenge it.

One of the central arguments in the next independence referendum will be on Scotland's ascension to the EU and the economic benefits gained from access to the single market and customs union, as opposed to being tied to a Brexit Britain run by far-right Tories. Mike Russell has set out "Brexit is actually the battleground on which independence will have to be fought and won – the truth versus the lie – for it is being used to cement the Tories in power for a generation with a dishonest, backward-looking, isolationist and impoverishing agenda, which includes diminishing and indeed destroying Scottish democracy – including even our current limited level of self-government."

Never forget that we are big enough, rich enough, and smart enough to be a successful independent country. Share the facts and keep the conversation going with #YESbecause. Johnson has already indicated he seeks another decade in power, and with record low public opinion in Scotland for his leadership, it is imperative that when the time comes, we are ready to fight for the better future we want - and deserve.



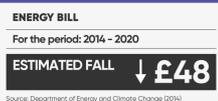
Independence

Links between Parliament and the constituency

UK Government's big lie on energy prices

With energy prices increasing from October (just as the cold weather sets in, and the UKG cuts the UC uplift and ends the furlough scheme) families in my constituency and beyond will be sorely pressed this winter. This reality is in stark contrast to the Better Together campaign's promise of 2014 that heralded "Lower energy bills for Scotland than if we leave the UK."

2014
UK government predicts lower energy bills



2021
Energy bills in the UK have risen by 40% since 2015



My much needed Energy Pricing Bill - on the Order Paper for October 22nd - will

sadly not progress unless the UKG takes it on. To date Ministers have refused, insisting that folk should rely on Price Comparison websites and the Energy Price Cap. Neither of which can solve the problems faced by many constituents. Despite the UKG projecting prices would fall in 2014, analysis shows that between 2015 and 2019 the average household energy bill increased by about £524 a year – that's a 40% hike. The impending increase means **15 million households** in the UK will have to **pay at least £139 more**. And similar increases

are predicted for April 2022. I am in no doubt this will disproportionately hit those on the lowest incomes, forcing many families to choose between heating and eating.

Tory betrayal over the Pensions Triple Lock

The Tories decision to break its triple lock promise on the State Pension adds to its National Insurance hike as another breach of its manifesto commitments. It is nothing short of a betrayal and an unacceptable attack on pensioners' incomes. Unlike the Tories, we will not be breaking our manifesto promise to stand up for pensioners. That is why we voted against the Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits Bill) 2021/22 and supported Ed Davey's reasoned amendment that would have prevented the Bill from having its Second Reading. The SNP also tabled an amendment attempting to require an impact assessment on levels of poverty among pensioners in each of the devolved nations. However, we all know the democratic deficit throughout the UK means that Scotland's MPs will be outvoted when we try to protect pensioners' incomes. The only way to truly tackle the plight of pensioner poverty is with Scottish independence. It is simply wrong that the UK devotes a smaller percentage of its GDP to State Pensions and pensioner benefits than most other advanced economies.

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