

January 2023 NEWSLETTER



Linlithgow & East Falkirk Constituency

Welcome

Happy New Year! You will likely remember from the tail end of last year that it was settled the Union is not voluntary. At the same time it became evident that the independence movement was also a struggle for democracy. In this first month of 2023 this struggle was affirmed by the UK Government (UKG) when it blocked Scottish Parliament legislation. Be in no doubt that the use of a section 35 order is a full-frontal attack on Scottish democracy. Be aware that we have now entered a new - and more dangerous - phase for devolution as the UKG has initiated a strategy to claw back power from the devolved nations of the UK. Read on for more details.

Westminster Update

17th January 2023: Order under section 35 of the Scotland Act 1998

Alister Jack MP, the Secretary of State for Scotland, blocked Holyrood's Presiding Officer from submitting the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill for Royal Assent. In the next breath of his statement he said "trans-gender people deserve our respect, our support and our understanding." If that is the same respect he has shown towards devolved legislation then trans-gender people should be worried. The legislation in question was passed after six years of wide consultation and with more than two thirds of cross-party MSPs supporting it - MSPs who were elected by the people of Scotland. Indeed, it was supported by every single party in the Scottish Parliament. The unprecedented use of a section 35 order to strike down the express wishes of the Scottish Parliament is not just anti-democratic but provocative and it sets a dangerous precedent. It is also the latest in a long line of anti-democratic actions by the UKG, not least the denial of a democratic vote on Scotland's future, which a majority of MSPs were elected to deliver. This attack on a devolved policy area signals an attack on devolved powers and that the days of devolution are numbered. I am certain that, if this Westminster veto succeeds, it will be the first of many. This UK Tory government has already introduced and passed legislation that impinges on devolved competencies, such as banning the right to strike and ripping up thousands of EU protections. More about the latter aberration below. It all shows how vital Scottish independence is. There has never been a more precarious time for devolution; or crucial time to escape Westminster control for good.

18th January 2023: Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill



This Tory Bill has passed its remaining stages in the House of Commons and is another bare-faced attack on devolution. SNP MPs completely rejected it as it also attacks workers' rights, food standards, nature, animal welfare, and our Scottish legal system. The UKG brought it forward despite not knowing how many regulations it would affect and with no regard for the UK's obligations under the terms of the EU Trade Agreement. It effectively rips up 47 years of protections for Scotland's exporters, workers, and environment, leaving any EU-derived right subject to arbitrary and automatic deletion at the end of 2023 unless the UK Minister intervenes. Notably, it is not required for Scottish Ministers to be consulted on any intervention. In a

nutshell, it gives the UKG freedom to abandon vital legislation that has protected Scottish interests. Among amendments the SNP tabled was one that would have stopped the Bill from affecting Scottish legislation in devolved areas, but the Tories voted it down - compounding the UKG's attack on Holyrood. So, in just over a week from Westminster resuming, the contempt the Tories hold for our Scottish Parliament was proven by firstly blocking a Bill that was passed there, and the next day riding roughshod over the devolution settlement. It is a pattern. Remember the UK Internal Market Act (that makes explicit any future act of Holyrood is subject to Westminster approval) is already law. This Bill shows that existing legislation is also on the chopping block. It tears to pieces large swathes of devolved legislation, solely due to where it originated. The Scottish Government has confirmed its intention to uphold all existing protections under the Scottish Parliament's competence and remains committed to aligning Scottish regulation with EU regulation; and re-joining the EU as an independent nation. As the Labour Party stands with the Tories in supporting Brexit and stopping Scotland from returning to the EU there is no alternative to Brexit Britain under Westminster control. At the risk of sounding like a broken record ... spread the word ... this piece of legislation and the outright attacks on the Scottish Parliament demonstrate why the only way to protect Holyrood from Westminster is with independence.

Active in the constituency

A personal thank you to the Scottish NHS

I'm sorry to say that I haven't been very active in the constituency since my last Newsletter as I took ill in October and had to undergo emergency surgery. In my first debate back in Westminster on 17th January, I put on record my gratitude to all the staff of the Scottish NHS. I am pleased to say that, at every stage - from the local GP through to the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh - I was treated fantastically. Thank you! My own experience brings into stark reality the suggestion from the former Tory Health Secretary, Sajid Javid MP, that patients should be charged £66 to use A&E and £20 for a GP appointment. As the SNP Health spokesperson in Westminster I, and the rest of my SNP colleagues, will always defend the founding principle that our NHS is free at the point of use. These plans show that public services are at risk under Westminster control. While health is devolved, NHS charges, creeping privatisation, and cuts in England would mean cuts to Scotland's budget. It's clear that only independence will fully protect our public services.

Recognition for Cost-of-living Events

In November I thanked my team for organising two excellent cost-of-living events. On 23rd January Mims Davies, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, also paid tribute to my team for holding cost-of-living events in my constituency. She credited the work we have been doing with local Job Centres and the DWP to help people at this difficult time. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with myself or my team if you need any assistance.

Links between Parliament and the constituency

Peter McLagan MP: an update

You might remember from my September Newsletter that I met with one of my constituents, David Main, who brought Scotland's longest serving MP during the reign of Queen Victoria to my attention. Since tabling the Early Day Motion (EDM), David and I have been continuing our efforts to get recognition for Scotland's first - and to date only - mixed-race MP, who withstood negative campaigning to become Parliament's longest serving Scottish Member until his resignation. Our collaboration has secured an article about Mr McLagan in the upcoming Oxford Dictionary of National Biography 2023. This distinguished publication is the national record of men and women who have shaped British history and culture and Peter is one of only some two thousand Scots to be so honoured. Following contact with the Speaker's Office the Deputy Chief Curator from the UKG's Heritage Collections has been in touch to say the Pioneers' display is currently being reviewed and they will seek to include Peter McLagan, subject to the necessary permissions and approval from the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art. I'll keep you posted.



Review of the Gambling Act 2005

In the UK two million families are blighted by problem gambling and, for those facing it, the impact can be harmful and addictive with one person everyday committing suicide in the UK because of gambling related harms. Even tens of thousands of children aged between 11 and 16 are addicted to gambling. The Gambling Act must therefore be modernised and effective for the digital age, and provide adequate protections against gambling related harms for problem gamblers and children. I've been following the UKG's review of the Gambling Act since it was announced in December 2020. For two years now I have been supporting EDMs, highlighting concerns about the level of problem gambling in the UK and the unacceptable level of gambling advertising on television, and tabling Written Parliamentary Questions (WPs). In July 2021, in answer to WPs I had tabled regarding the Gambling Act's ongoing review, the UKG said it was carefully considering the findings of research by Oxford and Warwick Universities. This was being considered alongside the responses to its call for evidence, which closed at the end of March 2021. The response went on to state "We aim to publish a white paper outlining our conclusions and policy proposals by the end of the year." At the end of 2021, the language relating to when the White Paper would be published changed to "in the coming months" and subsequently "in the coming weeks". Fast forward another year and the UKG is still being asked when the Gambling Act White Paper will be published. This month I co-signed a letter to the Prime Minister about the Gambling Act White Paper from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Gambling Related Harm – the second time I have done so. This Tory government would do better focusing on legislation that will benefit people, such as the Gambling Act review, instead of being hell-bent on dismantling perfectly good legislation that already serves people well in providing various protections.

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