

March 2020 NEWSLETTER



Linlithgow & East Falkirk Constituency

Welcome

...to this slightly delayed newsletter due to the volume of COVID-19 casework I have received. Parliament's adjournment on the 25th of March means much critical business has been postponed. However, the priority must be doing all we can to overcome the health and economic challenges this new coronavirus pandemic has presented and will, no doubt, continue to present. Rest assured my team and I are continuing to work in innovative ways to address people's problems. Please do all you can so that you and your loved ones stay safe during this worrying time.

Westminster Update

Given the current situation with the coronavirus pandemic, and as SNP Spokesperson for Public Health and Primary Care, in this section I will focus on some health and social care debates, that have taken place in Westminster since my last update.

NHS Funding Bill

A blatant affront to democracy happened on the 4th of February when Scottish, Welsh and Irish MPs were denied the right to have their votes counted in a crucial health debate about funding - despite the Bill in question having a knock-on effect on Scotland's block grant; the so-called "Barnett Consequentials". Under English Votes for English Laws (EVEL) non-English MPs can't vote on issues that only affect England, but clearly our funding affects us too! Yet another cast-iron argument for independence.



Social Care

Social Care is a devolved matter. Therefore, this debate on the 25th of February wasn't one we expected to have a vote on. Yet that didn't stop me having my say. The debate was secured by an English MP concerned about the social care funding crisis that has been created by nearly a decade of Tory cuts to council budgets, which has left 1.5million older people with unmet social care needs. The debate called for the UK Government to urgently reform social care and include plans for free personal care.

I was proud to be able to talk about what we have already achieved in Scotland through our devolved powers; the only UK nation currently delivering free personal care to all who need it. However, I took the opportunity to point out that Scotland's care sector will still be affected by the UK Government's proposed immigration policy.

Sadly, in the midst of this terrible COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit has not gone away. If we are to fix the problems of Social Care workforce shortages, we need an immigration system that is fit for purpose.

Nursing Workforce Shortage: England

Once again this debate on the 3rd of March benefitted from hearing about what happens in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and I joined my Celtic colleagues in condemning the political choices made by the UK Government that led to a decrease of more than 30% nursing applications in England. The Tories' austerity measures scrapped bursaries for student nurses in England, while in Scotland they were protected and increased by the SNP Scottish Government. Indeed, nursing student numbers in Scotland have increased for seven years in a row.

Continued

You will, no doubt, have heard the criticisms of Tory cuts resulting in the chronic NHS staff shortage ... and that was before the current health crisis hit. Now the hypocrisy resonates when they say how much they're behind it.

These few examples here demonstrate that, unfortunately, devolved administrations do not operate in a policy vacuum. We cannot escape that UK policies, such as those on Brexit and immigration, still affect us. That's why independence is the way forward.

(In)Active in the constituency

Social Distancing

The #Coronavirus pandemic has changed life for everyone. Or it should have! For me it means that I haven't been able to get out and about in the constituency as I usually do and my regular surgeries are cancelled until further notice. However, it doesn't mean that you can't get in touch with me.

My team and I are working extra hard to help as many folk as possible through this terrible time. We might be doing things a bit differently, but we're still here if you have a problem that you think we can help with. The contact details as shown below remain the same.

Links between Parliament and the constituency

Consumer Rights Act 2015 and Consumer Ombudsman Scheme Debate

On the 11th of February I secured a Westminster Hall debate to highlight a failing in the Consumer Rights Act 2015 and to call for its unambiguous enforceability in the future. I previously raised the 2015 Act on behalf of my constituents in a Public Petition more than two years ago, highlighting that it does not do enough to protect consumers against rogue traders who do not comply with the terms of the Act and urging the UK Government to review the Act to ensure better protection for consumers. It also asked for a review of the terms of the Act, to make membership of a professional body compulsory for traders, thereby giving consumers the ability to pursue a complaint with the consumer ombudsman.

The outcome of that petition was a Green Paper "Modernising consumer markets" that was meant to "closely examine markets especially those which are not working fairly for consumers." The consultation closed 21 months ago, yet nothing has changed. Kelly Tolhurst, the Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, responded that BEIS will publish a consumer and competition Command Paper in spring 2020 and carry out a five-year review of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 later in the year. Hopefully, this will finally address the situation.



Falkirk's Forgotten Villages

After presenting this Public Petition in January, I also secured a Backbench Business debate "Fuel Poverty and Energy Price Caps" that was schedule to take place on the 31st of March. This is one of the critical issues that has had to be postponed due to CVID-19. I'll keep you posted on any progress with this matter.

Bio-fuel and Red Diesel

I also presented a Personal Petition on behalf of a constituent because of concerns about ongoing problems farmers are experiencing with blocked filters in their machinery due to the use of bio-fuel. It requested the House of Commons to urge the Government to reallocate funding to the British Standards Institution to facilitate the establishment of a group to investigate the issue of bio-fuel in machinery; and to urgently review the specifications of bio-fuel levels in red diesel. Known and potential issues with biodiesel fuels need to be considered at the earliest opportunity. I'm sure this will not be the last we hear about this very important issue.



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CORONAVIRUS COVID-19

Social Distancing

AVOID

- Group gatherings
- Visits to bars/restaurants
- Sleep overs
- Playdates
- Visiting the elderly with children
- Crowded retail stores
- Gyms
- Visitors to the home
- Non essential workers in the home

USE CAUTION

- Visits to supermarkets
- Visit to pharmacy
- Visit to GP
- Traveling
- Check on friends and family safely
- Public transport

SAFE TO DO

- Go for a walk
- Jogging
- Working in the home
- DIY in and around the home
- Reading
- Going for a drive
- Video calls
- Phone calls

Just some of those who are vulnerable that these measures could help:
Patients who are elderly, history of lung illness, cancer patients, immune suppressed patients, immune compromised and those with varying underlying conditions.

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