

# March 2023 NEWSLETTER



Linlithgow & East Falkirk Constituency

## Welcome

Much has happened in the last two months that affects Scotland. Most significantly was Nicola Sturgeon's resignation as SNP Leader and First Minister on 15th February, surprising us all. Her tenure officially ended this week as her successor, Humza Yousaf MSP, steps into her big shoes! Exactly one month later the Chancellor presented his Spring Budget. No surprise here as he failed to take meaningful action to alleviate family poverty, invest in public services and help grow our economy. Then came the long-awaited appearance of Boris Johnson in front of Parliament's Privileges Committee over whether he deliberately misled the Commons about Partygate. Read on for more details. 

## Westminster Update

### 20th March 2023: Cash Acceptance

But first ... I led a Debate for the Petitions Committee in light of two petitions relating to the acceptance of cash. "Make it unlawful for shops to refuse cash payments" and "Require all businesses & public services to accept cash payments" both received a response from the UK Government (UKG) saying it "...does not plan to mandate cash acceptance." Research shows this matter is of interest to many people across the UK, not surprisingly the vulnerable, those with pressure on their budgets, and those from socioeconomically deprived communities are especially concerned. The cost-of-living crisis is adding to the number of people facing financial insecurity when prices are continually increasing every time we go food shopping. The cost-of-living crisis is also compounding the number of people who cannot afford connection to the internet, often leaving cash as their only option. Additionally, 61% of those who responded to a Petitions Committee survey ahead of the debate said they use cash as a means to control their spending. The UKG should be encouraging this responsible behaviour and not reverting to laissez faire policy, leaving cash acceptance up to individual businesses. The 61% supports earlier findings from the 2022 cash census, which identified 15 million people in the UK use cash to budget. There was also an access to cash review in 2019 that showed over 8 million adults in the UK "would struggle to cope in a cashless society. For many people in the UK, using cash is not a matter of choice, but of necessity" highlighting "poverty is the biggest indicator of cash dependency." I fear the trend towards a cashless society, which was bolstered by the Covid -19 pandemic, risks excluding a great many people and negatively impacting their lives. The protection of privacy is another reason cited for preserving cash as a payment method. The petitioners rightly point out "Not everyone wants a digital trail" and that without cash "people cannot make anonymous payments." Then, of course, there is the matter of freedom of choice. 95% of respondents to the Petitions Committee survey said they preferred to use cash to pay for things over other means of payment; and a census carried out last year by the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce showed that 96% of people often withdraw cash - with 83% having cash either in their wallet or at home. Yet, despite the UKG response recognising "millions of people continue to transact in cash across the UK, particularly those in vulnerable groups" it focused on legislating "to protect access to cash in the UK." To be clear, access to cash and cash acceptance, although connected, are not the same. The UKG must ensure the cash-dependent are not left behind, which includes protecting the right to use cash.



### 22nd March 2023: Boris Johnston's evidence to the Privileges Committee

After Boris Johnson gave evidence to the Privileges Committee on whether he intentionally misled Parliament over lockdown-era parties at Number 10, YouGov polling showed 82% of Scots think the former PM is "dishonest". Given he went to the lengths of swearing an oath on the King James Bible at the start of proceedings (something not done for over a decade) to convince all those watching that he was telling "the truth, the whole truth ..." I'm sure he will have been disappointed by these results. Having done this makes his testimony subject to the Perjury Act of 1911, meaning lying, or providing a false account, would be a criminal offence. Now, we all await the Committee's conclusions.

You can make your own mind up: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/12878/html/>

## Active in the constituency

### Changing of the Guard

Nicola's departure signalled the end of an era and triggered the SNP's first campaign for leadership in nearly 20 years. She has been an outstanding political leader and has taken support for independence to record levels, winning every national election by margins other parties could only wish for. She leaves a huge legacy on which to build and grow, and we all must do our best to do so - not least to complete the journey to independence.



And just as Nicola was a formidable force, Humza faces a formidable task to fill her shoes. However, he must not be underestimated, having won a fiercely contested - and close run - leadership election, and MSPs' votes to become First Minister (FM). And just as Nicola was the first female, and longest serving FM, Humza is the youngest, and first Scots Asian and Muslim FM, reflecting the equal and progressive country we want Scotland to be.

His first Leader Address reminded us all that in the SNP we are a family, a team: "...we are one team, and we will be **the** team, we will be **the** generation that delivers independence for Scotland." He also stressed that there is much work for us who believe in independence to do: "...we will only win by making the case on the doorsteps ... The people of Scotland need independence now more than ever ..." Who can argue with that?

The SNP is the only party offering real change from the damage and decline caused by the Tories and pro-Brexit Labour Party, who are completely out of touch with Scotland's interests. We will relentlessly focus on the issues that matter - tackling the Tory cost-of-living crisis, improving public services, strengthening the economy and offering people in Scotland a genuine choice over their future with independence.

We all have a part to play in persuading others to also believe in independence. Remind them of just some of what has already been achieved with limited powers: free tuition; free prescriptions; the baby box; free personal & nursing care; free bus travel for over 2 million people; and 7 new benefits that are only available in Scotland.

## Links between Parliament and the constituency

### Spring Budget

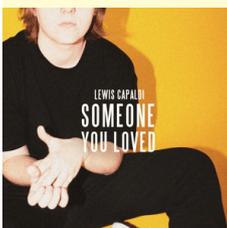
In his Budget the Chancellor confirmed a series of damaging measures that affects us all. Scrapping the Energy Bill Support Scheme with immediate effect, while energy bills are still sky-high, leaves households £400 pounds worse off. Imposing real-terms cuts to public sector pay and failing to introduce a Real Living Wage, costs millions of workers hundreds of pounds. Failing to scrap the benefits cap or two child cap, also costs many households hundreds of pounds. Overall, it fails to make a dent in the cost-of-living crisis, and comes as the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) warned living standards are expected to fall by 6%. The OBR also warns Brexit will mean "the volume of UK imports and exports will both be 15% lower in the long run than if we had remained in the EU... And we assume that this leads to a 4% reduction in the potential productivity of the UK economy." At least we can be thankful that his increase of prescription charges to £9.65 does not affect us. It's clear Scotland will continue to pay a high price under Westminster control and that independence is the only way for Scotland to build a strong, fair and prosperous future.

### Linlithgow & East Falkirk's remarkable talent

I have recently tabled Early Day Motions to celebrate the remarkable and diverse talent of two people who hail from my constituency. The first was to congratulate Bathgate bairn Dario Franchitti on being inducted into the Scottish Sports Hall of Fame. The motorsport legend is a three-time winner of the famous Indianapolis 500 as well as four-time IndyCar series champion. His lifetime of achievement in racing includes winning the McLaren Autosport BRDC Award in 1992, being crowned BBC Scotland's Sports Personality of the Year in 2007, and being elected into the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America in 2019. I also commended Dario for his bravery when he was involved in serious career-ending crash in 2013 at the Grand Prix of Houston, and I wished him continued success in his new career as a TV commentator.



The second was to praise West Lothian singer songwriter Lewis Capaldi, whose single "Someone You Loved" was named the UK's most streamed song. His breakthrough hit has accumulated 562 million UK streams, beating Ed Sheeran's Shape of You and Perfect, respectively. The song reached number one in March 2019 and stayed there for a total of seven weeks. It was first released as a download on 8 November 2018 and was later included on his 2019 debut album "Divinely Uninspired to a Hellish Extent". The album was the best selling album in the UK in 2019 and 2020, with "Someone You Loved" being the best selling single of 2019 in the UK.



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