

March 2024 NEWSLETTER



Welcome

Happy Easter! Since my last update - along with activists - I have been continuing to chap doors across the constituency and have conversations about the upcoming General Election. As recent events in Westminster will testify, it is clear that neither the Tories nor Labour will stand up for Scotland. More about this below. People are demanding real, meaningful change; a change of UK Government (UKG) from tired Tory blue to lacklustre Labour red just won't cut it. Scotland needs a change of the system with independence. Scotland has a right to choose. #YES

Westminster Update

Opposition Day Debate: 21 February 2024

The SNP in Westminster intended to use its Opposition Day Debate to call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Ahead of this, our Westminster Leader, Stephen Flynn MP, urged the UKG and Labour "to join with the vast majority of the international community" in backing an immediate ceasefire; and then ensure the UKG acts on it by applying maximum diplomatic pressure. Leading up to the debate however, Labour Party leader, Sir Keir Starmer MP, and the Commons Speaker, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, colluded to block a Parliamentary vote on the SNP Motion. 2 Knights of the British Empire plotting to not only block a vote on the SNP Motion, but fail the people of Gaza; an estimated 32,000 of whom have been killed since the horrific terror attacks of 7 October 2023. Those who asked for evidence of this were given it by Labour MP Chris Bryant, who admitted on Channel 4 News to filibustering before the debate. Even he admitted "... we need a system which doesn't allow people to manipulate the rules to be able to get what they want." Well we won't get that at Westminster! The Tories promptly sponsored an Early day Motion "That this House has no confidence in Mr Speaker" and I wasted no time in supporting it. Over 90 MPs currently agree. On the same evening I presented a Petition on behalf of my constituents on an immediate ceasefire in the region, highlighting "Britannia waives the rules": <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-02-21/debates/0DAE7998-18A9-48A1-9DD4-BACE478E4413/details#contribution-20760973-F63B-405C-8987-8D52614D34D3>

But it's not just the rules that the Speaker has broken; he also undermined the Speaker's role of impartiality as well as creating disorder. These are 3 of the role's job descriptors. 5 days later Lindsay Hoyle also broke his word that he would offer the SNP an immediate debate on the issue saying, "The House came to a resolution on this matter on Wednesday last week." How, on earth, can he remain in post? He should go.

Financial Statement and Budget Report: 6 March 2024

The Chancellor ushered in another decade of austerity cuts at the UK Spring Budget, failing to deliver the funding that Scotland needs for public services, infrastructure and cost of living measures. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) said current UKG policy, which the Labour Party backs, implies a real-terms cut to net public sector investment of more than 25% (£18 billion) between 2024-25 and 2028-29. The Labour Party leader backed all the main measures in the Tory budget and ruled out taxing the wealthy to protect public services. The Labour National Campaign Coordinator, Pat McFadden MP, was also forced to admit to BBC Newsnight that his Party supports all of the Tory budget and has identical fiscal rules; therefore, the presenter Victoria Derbyshire asked "... how does Labour's economic policy differ from the Conservatives?" How indeed? Moreover, both Sunak and Starmer must come clean on where the axe will fall after the IFS accused them of a "conspiracy of silence" over the cuts.

In stark contrast, the SNP rejects the Tory fiscal rules. Instead, we support more investment to improve public services and grow the economy - with the wealthiest paying their fair share. This growing threat from Westminster is just one of the reasons for voting SNP at the next General Election.

In presenting recent constituents' Petitions, I highlighted gaps in the Chancellor's Budget that are failing the people of Scotland. Read on for more detail of these.



Active in the Constituency

Linlithgow and East Falkirk Constituency



Cost-of-living Multiple-Agency Event

On 2 February I held a very successful and well attended drop in event at the Regal Theatre in Bathgate. I was delighted to have this opportunity to meet with many of my constituents while they were able to get free help and advice from a range of fantastic organisations. I would like to say a massive "Thank you!" to my staff for organising such a worthwhile day. Don't forget, I continue to hold regular surgeries across my constituency so any issues can be raised.

Campaigning for the Election and Independence

In my intro I mentioned the activists that have recently been out and about campaigning alongside me, and I also want to thank them for their unwavering support. SNP activists are top class; it is their hard work that has paved the way for independence. Research tells us that "peer-to-peer activism" is one of the most effective. People are more likely to listen to others who are like themselves, because they understand our lives, ambitions, and hopes. We can all play a part in getting our positive message out there by making sure as many people across Scotland as possible recognise the opportunities of independence. If you are not already aware, there is a great resource available that has briefings on the key issues surrounding the independence debate, which you can access here: <https://www.yes.scot/answers/>. Please get involved if you can, or contact me if you have any spare time to join me on the campaign trail.

Links between Parliament and the Constituency

Infected Blood Inquiry Recommendations

In my Newsletter of May 2023, I updated you on the progress - or lack thereof - of the Infected Blood scandal. It is approaching one year since I asked, again, that the UKG accept the Inquiry's recommendation for interim compensation to be widened and delivered without delay. Still nothing! Just how long will the victims and their families have to wait? There was no mention in the Chancellor's Budget of providing this compensation. Therefore, on 19 March I presented a public petition on this matter on behalf of my constituents, requesting that the House of Commons urges the UKG to implement the recommendations in the Second Interim Report of the Infected Blood Inquiry without any further delay.

Pensioners' Personal Tax Allowance

On the same day I also presented a petition from the constituents of Linlithgow and East Falkirk relating to pensioners' Personal Tax Allowance. I have said before that the deal pensioners in the UK get is among the worst in Europe. Unfortunately, this year's Spring Budget completely ignored the fiscal drag that pensioners are experiencing. The freeze on the Personal Tax Allowance until April 2028 affects many on lower incomes disproportionately, especially our pensioners who do not gain from cuts to National Insurance. This policy creates poorer pensioners who are already impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. This petition asks the UKG to consider the soaring costs of food and energy bills for pensioners when setting the Personal Tax allowance.



Women's State Pension Age

On similar themes of delay and injustice, the accelerated timetable for increases in women's State Pension Age, which short-changed 1950's born women, is back in the headlines. My SNP colleagues and I have continuously pressed the UKG to address this

pension injustice; and we welcome the publication of the long overdue report by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) that "has made a finding of failings by DWP in this case and has ruled that the women affected are owed compensation." On 25 March the Work and Pensions Secretary made a statement on the PHSO report, after which I took the opportunity to ask him if it was government policy to "dither, delay and deny justice until the 1950s-born women have died off?" There is an estimated 6,900 affected women in my constituency; many of whom are in dire need of compensation. There was little encouragement for them in the Minister's statement that failed to confirm whether the UKG will pay compensation to the women affected. The Labour Party has also failed to guarantee that they will honour Westminster's responsibility to provide justice and full compensation to the estimated 3.6 million affected women across the UK. As these women continue to be denied justice, I will look to raise a related Parliamentary Question when Parliament resumes after Easter recess.

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