

# November 2022 NEWSLETTER



## Welcome



I wish you all a very happy St. Andrew's Day! So ... a lettuce outlasted Liz Truss! Even the best author of farce couldn't make up the ridiculous sham that is Westminster. And now we have Sunak - the 10th Tory PM we haven't voted for since 1955. He, like the rest, is denying Scotland the choice over its future - despite never having won an election himself. In contrast, the SNP has won eight elections in a row since 2014, securing multiple mandates. It is crystal clear that the UK Government (UKG) is blocking the democratic rights of the people of Scotland and this was unequivocally confirmed by last week's Supreme Court judgement, more about this below.

## Westminster Update

### Motor Neurone Disease (MND) debate 20th October 2022

I was greatly saddened to hear about the death of rugby legend Doddie Weir at the weekend. I was privileged to have met him last year - albeit virtually due to Covid restrictions being in place at that time - before leading a debate on the 12th of July calling for funding for MND research to be targeted. Doddie started the petition that led to the debate and he managed to convey his positivity and energy to me even though we were unable to meet in person. Like the 5,000 people living with this neurodegenerative disease at any one time Doddie was remarkable, and a truly inspirational force of nature. I have no doubt that his influence and My Name's Doddie Foundation has and will continue to progress the aim of a world free of MND. In last month's debate I recalled my delight from November 2021, when the UKG had announced the £50 million funding over five years, specifically for MND research, that my debate earlier in the year had called for. However, as is often the case with this government, progress has been slow in allocating the funding; so I took the opportunity to ask the Minister exactly what progress had been made, and when the consultation on the MND partnership would lead to a tangible plan. Those suffering from MND need results now because, as Doddie has sadly shown, their life expectancy is far too short.



### Public Ownership of Energy Companies



On the 31st of October I led a Westminster Hall debate about the public ownership of energy companies. I set out the case, as I see it, for renationalising our energy assets. The debate was scheduled after a petition gained over 109,000 signatures calling for the UKG to "take back ownership of strategic energy assets" and "accept that the Free Market has failed the energy sector". In the midst of this current energy crisis it is easy to agree with the petitioners. Free markets are meant to be voluntary exchanges, accounting for supply and demand, with no government intervention. But Ofgem and the price cap introduction were already interventions in the energy market before the energy crisis triggered more. Like Rishi Sunak's so-called "loan-not-loan" that was to reduce every domestic electricity bill by £200 ... and then recover it over five years. Thankfully, that plan was

ditched and replaced by the energy bills support scheme, where domestic electricity consumers were to get £400 towards their bills, paid as a grant over six months. Then Liz Truss announced the two-year energy price guarantee - an intervention in an intervention - that was welcomed as she was reported to be acting "so people and businesses are supported over the next two years". But she couldn't get that right, with a UKG press release stating "a typical UK household will pay no more than £2,500 a year on their energy bill for the next two years from 1st October". MoneySavingExpert Martin Lewis, likely Britain's most trusted man, said "I've seen a lot of confusion, so let me start by saying there's NO MAXIMUM ENERGY BILL." Then Jeremy Hunt, the fourth Chancellor of 2022, announced that - instead of lasting two years - the energy price guarantee would last for just six months. It's a veritable hodgepodge of policies trying to legitimise people across the UK paying through the nose for energy costs, whilst companies rake in huge profits from UK oil and gas extraction. Even before Shell's third-quarter profits of \$9.5 billion were reported, its CEO said "The solution should not be government intervention but protection of those who need protection". We have eye-watering profits for the super-rich, and eye-watering bills for those who can least afford them. The UKG is making the rich richer at the expense of low- and middle-income households. A nationalised energy sector could deliver an integrated approach, guiding the country away from its dependency on unstable fossil fuels and tackling climate change, while protecting consumers at the same time.

## Active in the constituency

### Cost-of-living Events

The rising costs of living are impacting people across my constituency and beyond. The state of the private energy market, which I allude to above, was set up and overseen by UK Labour and Tory governments as energy policy is entirely reserved. Then there's inflation, which is sitting at 11.1% in the 12 months to October 2022, up a full percentage point since the previous month. This includes energy costs of course, but it also takes into account housing, food and transport costs (principally motor fuels). It's shocking that the Tories spent six months this year on leadership tussles when they should have been acting on the energy crisis and the inflation that is pushing the cost of living so high. I want to thank my team for organising two excellent cost-of-living



events within my constituency on the 4th and 18th of November. The first was held at the Reconnect Regal Theatre in Bathgate, and the second - for the Falkirk side of my constituency - was co-hosted by Falkirk MP John McNally in the Callendar Square Shopping Centre. These events provided spaces for local people to access free advice and support from various local and national organisations about things like energy, benefits, debt, and food insecurity during these challenging times. If you weren't able to attend these events but feel you would benefit from some advice don't worry. You can still contact me or my team for advice. Alternatively, you can arrange an appointment time at one of my regular local surgeries.




## Links between Parliament and the constituency

### Supreme Court

On the 23rd of November the UK Supreme Court delivered its judgment on the Lord Advocate's reference, which sought clarity on whether the Scotland Act 1998 allows the Scottish Parliament to legislate for a referendum on independence (Indyref2). It is relevant to note that the Supreme Court does not make the law but interprets it. Although disappointing, its ruling confirms we are not in a union of equals. The ruling clarifies – indeed exposes - that the unequal partnership we are in is not a voluntary union, despite a long-held "understanding" that it was. There was an Urgent Question granted in Westminster about the ruling, which you can read here: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-11-23/debates/CC72D2CE-6495-4A79-8798-74E0B48BE97F/ScottishReferendumLegislationSupremeCourtDecision>



The Supreme Court was not asked to decide if there is a democratic mandate for a referendum. The mandate and parliamentary majority for a referendum is undeniable. Nor was it asked if Scotland should be independent. Only the people of Scotland can make that decision. It was merely asked to decide if a referendum Bill could be brought before the Scottish Parliament without Westminster's agreement. Lawfully, it can't. This ruling makes it clear that Scotland can only be an equal nation outside of the UK by becoming an independent country, because currently we are not allowed to choose our own future. Therefore, the independence movement now encompasses democracy. It is a denial of democracy if our democratic right to choose our future is blocked. Put bluntly, Westminster is blocking the democratic will of the people of Scotland. Scottish democracy must not be denied. Since 2014, the Scottish National Party has won eight elections in a row. Last year, we won a landslide and the Scottish Parliament currently has the biggest majority for an independence referendum in the history of devolution. So, people in Scotland have made their views clear. Fundamentally, that democratic decision and the right of people to decide their future must be respected. Our voice cannot be silenced. However, any alternative route to achieving independence must be lawful and constitutional, as well as democratic. As the UK Government rhetoric about the UK being a partnership of equals rings hollow, now is the time – more than ever – to intensify the democratic campaign for Scotland's independence as well as the right of people in Scotland to decide our own future. Our First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP, will not give up on democracy. Neither will I. I hope you won't either. That is why Nicola Sturgeon wants the next UK General Election to be a de facto referendum, and will be asking the SNP National Executive Committee to convene a special party conference in the new year to discuss and agree the detail of this proposal. The UK Government will always find an excuse as to why now is not the time for an independence referendum. Let us do all we can to defend Scottish democracy and release Scotland from this unequal union. #YouYesYet

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