



Conference



On Saturday, Douglas Ross delivered an excellent speech at the Party' virtual conference, focusing on the core principle of the union and why independence is not inevitable as some people suggest. There has been very good coverage of the speech since but I know some members encountered difficulty logging on so here is his speech below in full.



Visit to Loch Leven's Larder with Douglas Ross



Last Monday, I accompanied Douglas on a visit to Loch Leven's Larder where we met owners Emma and Robin Niven. This visit was highly informative both in terms of hearing about the Larder's very successful trading during the pandemic and about the benefits of UK

Government funding for jobs and furlough and also the benefit of the cut in VAT from 20% to 5%.

Loch Leven's Larder closed in the early stages of the pandemic but re-opened with a new lay-out of the retail premises and an extended outdoor facility and play area for young families. Both have proved hugely popular with local visitors and tourists alike, as has the continued reliance on the sale of local farm produce.

Rishi delivered: Now SNP must start helping Scots business

ONCE again, Rishi Sunak has stepped up and offered a lifeline for Scottish jobs and businesses.

With Covid-19 cases on the rise, and the immensely successful furlough scheme winding down, it was right for the Chancellor and the UK Government to take further action.

Make no mistake, we remain at a perilous stage. The winter months are approaching and more restrictions are being applied to our day-to-day lives.

That's why it was so vital that the UK Government acts quickly to protect wages and livelihoods.

Indeed I had made the case directly to both the Chancellor and the Prime Minister in recent days for continued support for Scottish business, and protection for employees facing an uncertain future.

The new Jobs Support Scheme - topping up salaries for firms that cannot take staff back full time - will act as a lifeline for many workers who otherwise might be cast adrift.

None of us could have envisaged a year ago that a Conservative UK Government would be subsidising the wages of private sector staff up and down the country.

But we are living in unprecedented times and the Chancellor has taken bold, radical action to help steer our economy through the storm ahead.

The furlough scheme was so successful that it earned praise even from the SNP and Labour. Purloughing staff who were told to stay at home during lockdown from March onwards was the right thing to do.

It was a huge commitment, and the scheme protected more than 500,000 Scottish jobs and helped thousands of Scottish businesses stay afloat.

The additional package of grants, loans and direct support for the self-employed - as well as £6.6 billion in extra funding for Holywood - allowed us to get through those initial months.

It is hard to imagine what would have happened without that safety net in place.

However, I think most people would agree, even reluctantly, that the Govern-



By Douglas Ross

SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVE LEADER

ment cannot go on paying the wages of a third of the Scottish workforce indefinitely.

And, as the Chancellor made clear, no government, no matter what policies were pursued, could save every job or every business.

With a return to more stringent restrictions, there is bound to be a negative impact on trade, on football for shops and restaurants and on demand for goods and services.

Now is the time for more targeted support to help those sectors of the economy that need it the most.

In addition to the Jobs Support Scheme, I was pleased to see the extension of the VAT cut from 20 per cent to 5 per cent for the hospitality and tourism sector.

This is vital for Scotland.

Lifeblood

In my own constituency of Moray, and indeed across the country, tourism-related businesses are the lifeblood of many communities.

This will save many jobs that would otherwise have been lost. The repayment extension for bounce-back loans will also provide many firms with more breathing space - with the ability to spread payments over ten years rather than six.

And, of course, extending the Real Employment Support Scheme will provide help to many people who are facing uncertainty in terms of their income over the next six months.

In contrast to the sniping from the SNP benches at Westminster, the reaction from business and trade union leaders to the Chancellor's announcements has been very positive.

The Confederation of British Industry said the measures would save 'many hundreds of thousands of jobs across the country'.

The TUC said the Chancellor had 'done the right thing'.

I am sure these measures will be welcomed by businesses across Scotland, particularly the small and medium-sized firms which will be wondering if they can get through this crisis.

Right now, I know it will seem that there is no end in sight.

We are again facing severe restrictions on our social lives, and reductions in face-to-face contact with our loved ones. A widely available vaccine remains a distant prospect.

Hopefully, these financial measures will provide some level of certainty for businesses and their staff.

But we should be in no doubt that our economy remains very fragile.

The Chancellor's actions yesterday will help to save many jobs and that is why the new measures were necessary, and timely.

It is also why the Scottish Government must also now step up to the plate.

There is no doubt that the UK Government has delivered - from back in March when the furlough measures were first introduced - right up until now, with this latest financial support package.

But it cannot and should not be left to the UK Government alone to act.

The Scottish Government must show similar ambition and use all the powers at its disposal to help our country through this crisis.

The Economy Recovery plan that Benny Higgins produced for the Scottish Government had many welcome points and ideas that could have acted as starting points for progress.

But it has largely gathered dust on the desks of SNP ministers. The so-called plan that the SNP Government brought forward in response to the Higgins report was more like a plan to make a plan.

As we've seen time and again with this SNP Government over the years, it rarely thinks of the needs of Scotland's small businesses. It seems to

think business is something that just goes on, without anyone putting in the hard graft to make it happen. Even its own adviser, the businessman Jim McColl, has recognised that SNP ministers don't really get business.

This time, it's absolutely crucial that the SNP kicks into action and delivers a platform for our small businesses to survive and thrive.

The UK Government delivered the furlough scheme and bounce-back loans - what has the SNP Government done for small business during this pandemic?

We need it to finally step up - but it's not just about demanding that the SNP acts. We also need our two governments to set aside their differences and work together more closely. I think people across Scotland want to see that happening. It is something that I have been calling for throughout this crisis.

Grievances

The SNP can continue to have its grievances, and we can continue to make our political points.

But the next few months won't be smooth sailing. They won't be easy for any of us.

This virus remains a real threat. It's not going away any time soon and we're all going to have to tough it out and make the necessary sacrifices to protect people around us - our friends, neighbours and older family members.

But we can and we will get through it, together.

That last word is the most crucial - together. We're only going to be able to rebuild our economy and get Scotland back on track with both of our governments firing on all cylinders, together.

What we need is both of our governments united in decisive and ambitious actions that protect jobs and give businesses the tools they need to come through the other side of this crisis.

That's what I will be campaigning for in the coming months - a united economic response that straddles support to those who need it.

If both of our governments do what's necessary together, this pandemic doesn't need to be the point where Scotland's businesses hit rock bottom.

It can be the moment where we start to bounce back and go on to new heights.

JONATHAN BROCKLEBANK IS AWAY



22,000 signatures now on Save our Outdoor Education Centres petition

On Tuesday 22nd September I was pleased to host my Member's Business debate on safeguarding the future of our residential outdoor education centres and even more pleased that 17 MSPs chose to participate all agreeing with the motion.

I wrote to Richard Lochhead, the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, asking for urgent support for our centres as they face up to yet more months without any youngsters being able to visit them.

I am awaiting the response from the Scottish Government following the meeting with officials and those who run the centres.

**STRATHEARN
HERALD**

**Deeply worried outdoor
centres facing closure**

**Scotland Outdoor Education Centres are in
'The Last Change Saloon' Says MSP**

**Heartland
Multimedia**

THE COURIER.CO.UK

**Fife MSP warns outdoor education centres could
close without Scottish Government intervention**

**Save Your Outdoor Centres – they are
Never More Needed than now**

tfn

Voting to prioritise education over independence



On Wednesday 23rd September, the Scottish Conservatives used their business time to demand that the SNP prioritise education over independence. Needless to say the Greens combined with the SNP to ensure we wouldn't win the debate but we made it very clear indeed about why the warped priorities of the Scottish Government are so detrimental to our schools.



Being a lockdown student - Gregor Smith

The imprisonment of students is a move by the Scottish Government which even old Eastern Europe dictators would have balked at. Confined to our accommodation with threats of expulsion if we dare to venture outside, we have been left in the cold- scared to do anything which may constitute such a breach. With many of us working part-time in the hospitality sector, it was unclear if going into work would result in the termination of our education.

As we obeyed the orders and stayed inside at the weekend, our same aged non-student friends joined the rest of the population in going to pubs and restaurants. We remained in our accommodation in disbelief that we could not only be discriminated against but also be singled out as a major spreader of the virus. Students have been penalised for going into further education and banned from enjoying what should be the best years of our lives. Thankfully, the public backlash towards the Scottish Government's irrational plan to permanently ban students from bars and restaurants caused the First Minister to perform a high-speed U-Turn- resulting in the lockdown length being reduced to one weekend.

Throughout the summer, universities gave assurances that courses would be 'blended learning' - a mix of online and face to face classes, which is why so many students have moved into halls or accommodation under the assumption that they had to be present to attend their course. Clearly this is not the case, with the fortunate students scrambling to book transport home as others are locked into rental agreements. For us that remain at university we have one important question that needs to be answered, will we get home for Christmas?



Some movement from the Scottish Government on the Hate Crime Bill

As the emails and letters continue to flood in from concerned constituents about the threats to free speech, the Scottish Government has made a partial climb down on part 2 of the bill admitting that the way sections of the bill currently stand paves the way for misinterpretation and the making of bad law. Whilst there is still a long way to go to amend this bill effectively there are signs the pressure is telling on the SNP and that they will have to give way. We have every intention of continuing that pressure over the coming weeks.



Wildlife Crime

In comparison with many other categories of crime, good progress has been made on reducing wildlife crime but sadly that is not true of the unacceptable abuse which is now being levied at those who work on our estates. I am currently campaigning for stricter laws and higher penalties.

Gamekeepers hit out at estates 'hell'

CRIME: Woman charged over damage amid spate of disturbances

SEAN O'NEIL

A woman has been charged and two others are being sought by police amid a spate of disturbances at Perthshire country estates. Gamekeepers say their lives are being "made hell" by visitors, with some claiming they are being spat at and abused by walkers.

In one incident, at an estate near Crieff earlier this month, three women were captured on CCTV interfering with a legal trap that had been put down to control predators. Two of the devices were later found damaged and another was stolen.

One woman has been charged in connection with the incident. Two more have been identified.

One estate worker said: "It is sickening when folk can't just enjoy the countryside and their local walk without resorting to wrecking things."

MSP Liz Smith has called for "tighter measures" on criminal activity.

She said: "This is completely unacceptable practice and should not be tolerated."

See full story on page 5



MSP Liz Smith has hit out at the criminal activity on Perthshire estates. Pictures: Steve MacDougall.

Estate workers call for protection from public

POLICE: Woman charged amid spate of attacks on land and gamekeepers

SEAN O'NEIL

Perthshire gamekeepers are demanding greater protection following a series of attacks on individuals and property, which have resulted in one woman being charged and two others being sought by police.

Estate workers say their lives are "being made hell" amid claims they have been spat at and had tools stolen by people walking on their land in recent weeks.

In one incident, CCTV cameras at an estate near Crieff detected three women who appeared to be interfering with a trap that had been set for the legal control of predators.

Further investigations by the estate found two traps had been damaged and one stolen.

Police have charged one woman in connection with the incident and have identified two more.

A gamekeeper from the estate said people needed to understand the importance of their role to rural communities.

The estate worker, who asked not to be named, said: "Everyone is having to cope with a changed world and it is sickening when folk can't just enjoy the countryside and their local walk without resorting to wrecking things."

"It is making people's lives hell and what they don't realise is that, by targeting these estates, they are

“It is making people's lives hell and what they don't realise is that, by targeting these estates, they are hurting their local business as well.”

ESTATE WORKER

hurting their local businesses as well. At the moment, there are around a dozen local estates in the area who are bringing shooting visitors to participate in country sports.

"This is having a positive knock-on effect to local businesses and trades in Crieff and Comrie that have been really struggling due to the pandemic."

The Tayside and Central Scotland Moorland Group (TCSMG) backed the workers' claims, saying there had been "a long list" of incidents in the region.

Alice Bugden, co-ordinator of the group, has written to politicians on their behalf demanding answers.

She said: "During lockdown, we have had people being spat at, people dumping asbestos on estate grounds and gamekeepers' tools being damaged or even stolen."

"It cannot go on this way and we have contacted decision makers to see what more can be done."

Conservative MSP Liz Smith said criminal activity on estates cannot be tolerated.

The Mid Scotland and Fife politician said: "I am very supportive of tighter measures to address this criminal activity."

"This is completely unacceptable practice and should not be tolerated, nor should the personal abuse being suffered by those who work on our estates."

"Earlier this month, I met with Inspector Craig Stephen in the Tayside section of Police Scotland to discuss what needs to be done both to identify the culprits and bring them to justice."

People's livelihoods are at stake here and that is why urgent action has to be taken."

Police were asked to comment.
rose1@bbc.com

Message from the Countryside Alliance regarding its rural crime survey- autumn 2020

Crime has always been a key issue throughout the countryside, but it has only risen up the national agenda over the last few years thanks to growing awareness of the problems that rural communities are facing. One of the ways that we like to spread awareness of these issues is by coming to you and asking how you are affected by it.

We are seeking the views of those who live in Scotland, and work in, or regularly visit, rural areas, on that same subject. Rural policing is an important issue in the countryside, and we'd appreciate it if you could tell us about any crimes that have been committed against you, including ones that were not reported to the police. How did they make you feel? Did the police respond appropriately? These are all important questions and we're giving you the chance to make your voice heard.

This survey will only take around 10 minutes of your time and all responses are anonymous.

The results of this survey will be presented to the Scottish Parliament ahead of the election next year in order to make sure that rural crime, and your policing concerns, are given the attention that they deserve. We will also present these findings to the Scottish Government and Police Scotland.

The survey will close on Sunday 24th October 2020.

[You can view the survey here](#)

Crieff Police Station Move

Readers will be aware that Crieff Police Station will almost certainly be closing in King Street with officers relocating to part of the council office buildings in James Square. The public consultation was only completed last week but the proposed move was generally welcomed by residents, the majority of whom were delighted to hear that the police presence in the town would be retained albeit on a different, more modern site.



Bank of Scotland Kinross

Last Monday, I met with Bank of Scotland officials and Kinross community council representatives and Cllr Callum Purves to discuss latest developments regarding the pending closure of the Bank of Scotland branch. This remains a matter of great concern to the people of Kinross, Milnathort and Cleish especially as local bus networks and timetables have been disrupted during the pandemic.

We are hopeful that the Bank of Scotland has now decided to delay the closure of the Kinross branch until February next year and that Bank officials will engage fully with local residents about concerns over use of the Co-op post office branch for banking services.



And finally an update on the Alex Salmond inquiry.

Last Thursday in the chamber at FMQs, Nicola Sturgeon and Ruth Davidson had a ferocious exchange over the Alex Salmond inquiry. Ruth pressured the first Minister over the Scottish Governments handling of not just Alex Salmond's trial, but also how the Scottish Government has treated the Scottish Parliaments inquiry into the mishandling of the Salmond case and

the Scottish Governments refusal to hand over vital evidence.

You can read the exchange below:

Question 1: Subject, Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints (Request for Material) 1.

Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): *In January 2019, the First Minister said that the Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints, also referred to as the Salmond inquiry,*

“will be able to request whatever material they want, and I undertake today that we will provide whatever material they request.”—[Official Report, 17 January 2019; c 14.]

The inquiry has requested material and the Government has rejected the request. What has made the First Minister break her word?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): *I take those matters and the inquiry very seriously, as all of us should. That is not an accurate characterisation of the position.*

As I understand it—and I will come back in a second to say why I am couching it in that way— the only material that has not been provided by the Scottish Government is material about which there is a legal reason why it cannot be provided. That includes the issue of legal privilege, which all organisations must have regard to.

As I understand it—and this information is publicly available—more than 1,000 pages of material have been made available by the Government, and Government officials have so far given more than 10 hours of oral evidence. The Government has intimated to the committee that it intends to initiate legal proceedings to try to get to a position where it can make more material available that it cannot currently make available due to legal restrictions. All of what I have just said is in the public domain.

I have recused myself from making decisions about the Scottish Government’s submissions—I advised Parliament of that back at the outset. The reason for that is very simple and absolutely right: part of the remit of the committee is to look at my conduct. I think that it would be wrong if I was the minister taking decisions about the content of Scottish Government submissions. I am prepared to bet that, if I was in that position, Ruth Davidson and others would be standing here saying that that was deeply wrong and improper.

I turn to my position. I am interested in putting the facts out here. I am not sure how much of what I am about to say is understood by those who are not on the committee. The committee

has been in possession of substantial written evidence from me for two months now. That has not been published, which is entirely the committee's decision. However, it is a bit galling for me to hear Conservative members of the committee say that somehow I am not answering questions. I also stand ready to give oral evidence to the committee at any point it chooses to call me. I have not yet been invited to give oral evidence to the committee.

Any accusations that I am somehow not cooperating with the committee have no substance at all. I have done everything that the committee has asked of me and I will continue to do so because I respect the committee's process. I am starting to think that that may be the difference between me and Conservative members.

Ruth Davidson: *I know that the Nicola Sturgeon who is First Minister likes to pretend that she is not the Nicola Sturgeon who is also leader of the Scottish National Party, but I struggle to believe that the Nicola Sturgeon who committed to the chamber 18 months ago to give the inquiry whatever material it requested from her Government is the same Nicola Sturgeon who stands here today saying, "I've recused myself and it's nothing to do with me, gov."*

The First Minister did say something that was correct, which was that we saw something utterly unprecedented yesterday. The convener of a committee of this Parliament was forced to write to the courts to get access to documents that it needs because Scottish Government ministers refuse to hand them all over. She has been forced to do so because, in her words:

"We had hoped to be in a position to hear further oral evidence, but with responses still outstanding from the Scottish Government, the chief executive of the SNP and the former First minister, all of this means that we simply cannot proceed at this stage."

Two of those demands fall directly within the gift of the First Minister, who is head of the Scottish Government and leader of the SNP. She could ensure with a snap of her fingers that the evidence is provided. Why will she not do so?

The First Minister: *It is interesting that the letter from the committee's convener seeks the court's permission to publish material. The Scottish Government had already intimated to the committee that it was going to initiate legal proceedings in order to put itself in a position where it can provide material that it cannot currently provide because of legal restrictions. The Scottish Government actually wants and intends to do exactly that.*

The material that has not been provided is material that cannot be provided for one legal reason or another. Other than that, and as I have said, 1,000 or more pages of material and 10 hours of oral evidence by Scottish Government officials have already been given.

It is important, for a variety of reasons, to take the committee seriously. Regarding my role as

party leader, a request for evidence was made to the SNP. That is all in the public domain and can be found on the committee's website. That request was acceded to and evidence was given by the deadline that the committee set. People can go and read the request and the answers that were given. The committee made further requests and did not put a deadline on those, but that material is currently being prepared. The idea that the Scottish Government or the SNP is trying to obstruct the committee bears no scrutiny whatsoever.

I come back to this point: I was asked to give evidence to the committee in a personal capacity and I did that two months ago when I gave substantial written evidence to it. It is not down to me that that has not been published yet. I stand ready at any time—today, next week, the week after that—to turn up at the committee and give evidence to it orally. I have not had an invitation to do that yet.

When I said earlier that I suspected some of the Conservatives' motives here, I was met with a cry of "That's outrageous!" I will say why I fear that what I said is the case. I have given that written evidence and stand ready to give oral evidence when I am invited to do so. However, despite presumably knowing that, a Conservative member of the committee issues almost every week political comment to the effect that I am not answering questions. It starts to sound to me like it does not matter to the Conservatives what evidence any of us gives: they have already made up their minds about the outcome that they want the committee to have.

Ruth Davidson: And yet the funny thing is that the question that I asked her related to a quote from the SNP convener of that committee, so I do not think that it is just a party-political issue.

If the Scottish Government is not going to fully co-operate with the inquiry, and if the First Minister is not going to keep her word that she will "provide whatever material" the committee requests, I am afraid that she leaves us no option but to come here and ask questions directly to her face. I will therefore ask her one.

In recent days, private messages purporting to come from the SNP's chief executive, Peter Murrell, have been published in the media. The messages say that it is a

"good time to be pressurising"

the police, and

"TBH the more fronts he is having to firefight on the better for all complainers."

In this case, "he" is Alex Salmond.

We do not know whether those messages actually come from the SNP chief executive, but they were passed to the committee, and it deserves answers. I directly ask the First Minister, who is also the leader of the SNP: are those messages genuine or not?

The First Minister: *As I understand it, the obtaining of those messages—and the passing of them to the committee; it appears to me that when they were passed to the committee, they were immediately leaked to the media—is currently a matter of police investigation.*

I am happy to answer any questions before that committee that it wants to ask. People are saying answer—the committee has not asked me. I am not standing here—and I do not think that it is reasonable—to be asked questions about things that other people might or might not have done. Call the people who the messages are purported to come from and ask them the questions; call me and I will answer for myself.

The issue here is that the committee can convene this afternoon and I will answer questions about my conduct before that committee. It is outrageous that I am in a position right now of having given written evidence to the committee two months ago that has not been published—that is not down to me. I have not been invited to give evidence to the committee, yet I am somehow being accused of not being prepared to answer questions and, in Parliament, being expected to answer on behalf of other people. If people want to take this seriously, treat the committee process with respect and take it seriously.

Ruth Davidson: *My understanding is that the police inquiry is about how the SNP's former justice minister received the messages. That does not preclude the First Minister from saying whether they are genuine—she knows that. Throughout this affair, the First Minister's excuse has been that she can swap hats whenever it suits her: Nicola Sturgeon who leads the SNP is not the same person as Nicola Sturgeon who runs the Scottish Government. That is complete nonsense and hides the truth, which is the shabby abuse of power that this affair has revealed.*

We have the head of the civil service having to be recalled to the inquiry because she cannot remember or will not answer key questions; a tranche of Government emails related to the inquiry deleted; committee hearings having to be suspended because they cannot continue due to obstruction; and a committee chairwoman having to write to the courts to get information that the First Minister promised 18 months ago she would undertake to provide.

Two years ago, Nicola Sturgeon told the media with regards to the Salmond case:

"I ... relish the prospect to answer all and every question".

On today's performance, the question is, when is she going to start?

The First Minister: *Okay. I have not been invited to give evidence to the committee, so here—[Interruption.] Here it is: I will turn up to the committee next week and give evidence, if the committee invites me.*

I gave written evidence to the committee, meeting its deadline, two months ago. That has not been published. Let me be very clear: I respect the committee's right to decide what it publishes and when, but I cannot be held responsible for the fact that the evidence that I have submitted has not yet been published. I cannot be held responsible for the fact that the committee has not yet invited me to give evidence. I am trying to respect the process of the committee. The committee can call me any time that it likes. I will turn up on the date and at the committee room, as the committee asks, and I will give evidence to it. It has not yet asked me to do so.

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