



Two Scottish Conservative wins in the debating chamber

Two weeks ago the Scottish Conservatives used their business time to lead two debates, both of which won support from all the other opposition parties. The SNP was therefore defeated twice on one afternoon.

In the first debate, Murdo Fraser demanded that the necessary evidence for the Holyrood enquiry into the Scottish Government's handling of the Alex Salmond harassment was made public. As readers know, there has been a complete lack of transparency to date with Scottish Government ministers refusing to hand over the necessary paperwork – that is despite repeated calls from members of the committee investigating the harassment complaints, speaking unanimously and on a cross-party basis, seeking publication of vital information that the committee believes is essential to allow it to do its work. A vital component of the missing information is the legal advice that informed the Scottish Government's decision making— specifically, its decision to defend the judicial review pursued by Mr Salmond. We know that Mr Salmond had counsel's opinion, which said that his prospects of success in that case were substantial. We know that the Scottish Government conceded the judicial review, admitting that Mr Salmond was correct. We also know that the award of expenses paid to Mr Salmond—more than £500,000 of taxpayers' money—was at the highest level available in the circumstances, and is a level of award made only when the defence has been conducted, in the words of Lord Hodge, "either unreasonably or incompetently". We therefore know that something went far wrong with the Scottish Government's legal case, and we need to understand why that happened and what led to such a loss of public funds. It is surely a matter of legitimate public interest to understand such a catastrophic failure within the Scottish Government that cost the taxpayer so dearly. We will continue to push for the truth about this very important case.



In the second debate, Donald Cameron fully exposed the SNP's failing on care homes, most especially the fact that patients who had tested positive with covid19 in hospital were released into care homes without the proper checks being undertaken. Given the gravity of this situation, we called on the Scottish Government to set up an urgent public enquiry so that the mistakes could be clearly identified – most especially who was responsible for the decisions made. The other parties supported these calls. The Scottish Government has clearly made mistakes that may have cost lives.

At the heart of our debate were the findings of the detailed report from Public Health Scotland. This was released in late October and confirmed that 113 Covid-positive patients were sent from hospitals to care homes and 3,061 patients were discharged into care homes without being tested at all. We also know that, since the start of the pandemic, there have been, as of today, 2,048 deaths from coronavirus in our care homes, and that, as of 28 October, 134 adult care homes had a current case of suspected Covid-19.

Those are serious and concerning figures. However, there is a lot that remains unknown. We do not yet know the number of positive tests from care homes that suffered outbreaks after receiving a Covid-positive patient or the number of positive tests from care home staff. We do not yet know when precisely the First Minister became aware that Covid-positive patients were transferred from hospitals to care homes and what action she took to investigate that. Those are serious questions that require serious and urgent answers. Politicians of all political stripes have demanded clarity on numerous occasions from the First Minister, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport and public bodies such as Public Health Scotland. It is regrettable that those answers have not often been forthcoming. That is why an urgent public enquiry is so desperately needed.



The first vote was won 63 to 55 and the second vote was won by 64 to 1 with 57 abstentions (SNP trying to be clever!)

Encouraging progress with saving our outdoor education centres

I am pleased to report that very good progress has been made with regard to the campaign to save our outdoor education centres. On Friday 6th November I hosted a meeting with three key stakeholder groups and also, Mark Beaumont, well known to all of us as Britain's foremost long distance cyclist and world record holder for the round the world cycle of 18,000 miles (79 days!). Mark has been passionate in his support for the public petition which now has just under 25,000 names on it and has been immensely helpful in terms of both the short term and long strategy for our centres, making sure they will stay open over this winter but also, and much more importantly, in the future. Shortly, we will be publishing a strategy paper building on all the work we have undertaken to date. It will make recommendations to the Scottish Government about what needs to happen to secure the future of our centres.



Poppy Scotland



I am delighted to say that the triple marathon I organised during the past two weeks raised £1,380 and I want to thank all those who generously donated. Our total time was 11hrs 37 mins and 27secs and the winning guesses (all within 5 mins of the correct total!) were:

1st Rosemary Culley

2nd Emma Veitch

3rd Jimmy Moncrieff

4th Ian Palmer

Clearly, this has been a difficult year for Poppy Scotland given all the restrictions in place so we were delighted to play our small part. I was also delighted to speak for the Scottish Conservatives in the parliamentary debate.

You can read my speech here:

On Sunday in Whitehall, the cenotaph, 100 years on from its unveiling by King George V in 1920, was once again the focus of the nation's annual remembrance. The monument's simplicity and grace, as well as the poignancy of the tomb of the unknown warrior, which was attended by Her Majesty the Queen just a few days ago, are, together, the most powerful symbols of our remembrance.

There may have been fewer wreaths this year, fewer veterans on parade and fewer opportunities for members of the public to pay their respects, but nothing can ever dim the memory of all those who gave their lives so that we can enjoy our freedom, or the nation's determination to remember them. As the years pass, so too do anniversaries of our war history, but the significance of our acts of remembrance only grows.

Those acts of remembrance, small or large, private or public, are part of the very being of this nation, and rightly so. They demand our gratitude for all those who made the ultimate sacrifice, but should also make us think about our past and about what we have to do to build

a better future, because that is the real legacy that those who did not come home would want.

For all the stench and hell of war, so vividly encapsulated in many of the poems written by Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon in 1917, as they convalesced in Craiglockhart hospital in this great city, there is an obligation upon us all to reflect and, perhaps especially as politicians, to learn the lessons of the past, so that those who did make the ultimate sacrifice did not do so in vain. Their loyalty, their dedication and their unfailing sense of duty should not be treasured because of any glorification of war, but because those attributes are those on which we can build a better future.

The poppy, our annual personal symbol of remembrance worn on the left side, across our hearts, and representing all those battlefields in Flanders where once the guns and shells exploded, is a reminder of the peace that we seek in our world. Poppies matter so much because they are the life-blood of the Royal British Legion and therefore the life-blood of all the care that the legion provides for our veterans and their families, who need our assistance every day of the year, whether that means helping them to address the physical or the psychological scars of battle.

In normal times, 30 per cent of the income of the Royal British Legion comes from poppy sales, but this year that income has, of necessity, been badly affected. It has therefore been really good to see the extraordinary efforts to which so many communities have gone in thinking of additional ways to support the poppy appeal, with many showing exactly the same dogged spirit that we have seen throughout those communities to support those who have become so vulnerable to Covid-19. It is particularly good to see how many young people have been involved and the lengths to which so many schools have gone, despite all the challenges that they face, to help children understand and remember.

On a personal level, raising money for Poppyscotland is part of my own small contribution, but it also helps me to remember my father, a corporal who served in the RAF in the dark days of the Mediterranean battle in Malta. Unlike so many men in his air squadron and in the ground crews in Luqa, he came home from the war, but not without many difficult memories that stayed with him for all the time that he lived.

When the Parliament commemorated the centenary of the Royal Air Force not long ago, I recalled that one of the most visited exhibits in the war museum in Valletta is a Gloster Gladiator biplane known as Faith, the sole survivor of the trio of biplanes, Faith, Hope and Charity, whose pilots, single-handedly and against all the odds, defended the tiny island of Malta before the full onslaught of the Luftwaffe. For my father, those aeroplanes symbolised not only the ordeal of the RAF servicemen and the people of Malta, who stood courageously against the axis nations, especially when all looked lost, but also the human qualities that we

need most as we each face the challenges of life. It is those human qualities that we commemorate now, and we thank the Royal British Legion for being the mainstay of our remembrance.

New Scottish Government research confirms grouse shooting provides considerable benefits to Scotland's rural economy

After all the recent fuss about whether driven grouse shooting should be licensed, last week, the Scottish Government report conducted by Scotland's Rural College and the James Hutton Institute concluded that driven grouse shooting was a core part of rural Scotland on which much need investment and many jobs depended and which was crucial for environmental conservation. Alex Hogg chairman of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association welcomed the findings of the report as did Sarah-Jane Laing of Scottish Land and Estates. It is now crucial that the Scottish Government abides by these findings and I will be pushing Roseanna Cunningham, as Cabinet Secretary for the Environment at every opportunity.

The report also included one very worrying trend and that is the increase in the level of abuse – often online and in social media - which gamekeepers are having to endure. This is completely unacceptable and some about which I raised my concerns in parliamentary questions.

Grouse shooting benefits Scotland's rural economy, says government research

By Simon Johnson
SCOTTISH POLITICAL EDITOR

GROUSE shooting delivers major economic benefits in Scotland's rural communities and converting estates to woodland would result in job losses, a government study has concluded.

The research, published yesterday, found that the sport sustains many jobs and delivers high levels of local and regional investment while receiving no public funding.

A widespread transition away from driven grouse towards woodland creation would most likely result in job losses "in some regions", it said, although some of this could be offset through the development of tourism.

The study also warned that shifting the use of moorland to conservation projects, woodland and farming - as favoured by environmental groups - would require an extra cash injection by "wealthy individuals" or the taxpayer.

Any loss of sporting revenues is also likely to increase funding requirements for essential deer management", it said, with the extra money needed "at a time of increasing pressure on public budgets".

The report, led by Scotland's Rural College in conjunction with the James Hutton Institute, also said that 64 per cent of gamekeepers had been subjected to threatening behaviour or abuse at least once in the previous year.

It was published prior to the Scottish Government's response to the independent Werritty review on grouse moor management, which recommends a licensing scheme be imposed in five year's time.

The SNP review also suggested land managers should report annually on the number of mountain hares culled to protect grouse from disease.

Gamekeepers, landowners and country sports groups last night welcomed the new assessment and argued that ministers must heed its conclusions.

Sarah-Jane Laing, chief executive of Scottish Land & Estates, said the findings are "definitive proof" of the economic benefits of grouse shooting.

Alex Hogg, chairman of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, said the sport "helps to keep the heartbeat in fragile communities and the lights on in the glen houses".

Liz Smith, the Scottish Tories' shadow environment secretary, said: "Such is the scale of its contribution, it would be profoundly irresponsible of the Scottish Government not to consider the socio-economic implications of imposing unnecessary and damaging regulation on the sector when it formally responds to the independent review."

The report found driven grouse created a full-time job for every 3,573 acres of land compared to 9,884 acres for forestry, 5,189 for conservation and 4.4K for sheep farming.

A Scottish Government spokesman said ministers would give "careful consideration" to the findings and will respond to the Werritty review this autumn.

Fly-tipping

Last week, I asked Mairi Gougeon the Scottish Government Minister for Rural Affairs and Natural Environment, about what action the Scottish Government is taking to update Scotland's outdated fly-tipping laws, to enabling local authorities to pursue and prosecute fly-tippers and ensure they are held responsible for their actions.

You can see a video of my full question and response on my twitter @MspLiz

Chancellor confirms the extension of furlough



Mr Speaker,

On Monday, the Prime Minister set out the action we need to take between now and the start of December to control the spread of coronavirus.

In response, we're providing significant extra support to protect jobs and livelihoods in every region and nation of the United Kingdom:

An extension to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme;

More generous support to the self-employed and paying that support more quickly;

Cash grants of up to £3,000 per month for businesses which are closed, worth over £1 billion every month;

£1.6 billion for English councils to support their local economy and local healthcare response;

Longer to apply for our loan schemes and the Future Fund;

The chance to top-up Bounce Back Loans;

And an extension to the mortgage payment holidays.

All on top of more than £200 billion of fiscal support since March.

This statement follows the Bank of England's monetary policy decisions earlier today, meaning all economic and monetary institutions are playing their part.

The IMF just last week described the UK's economic plan as "aggressive", "unprecedented", successful in "holding down" unemployment and business failures and "one of the best examples of coordinated action globally".

Our highest priority remains the same: to protect jobs and livelihoods.

That's why we've already decided to extend the Job Retention Scheme to December.

But people and businesses will want to know what comes next; how long we plan to keep the scheme open, and on what terms.

They want certainty.

The government's intention is for the new health restrictions to remain only until the start of December.

But, as we saw from the first lockdown, the economic effects are much longer lasting for businesses and areas than the duration of any restrictions.

So we can announce today that the furlough scheme will not be extended for one month – it will be extended until the end of March. The government will continue to help pay people's wages, up to 80% of the normal wage.

I also want to reassure the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The furlough scheme was designed and delivered by the Government of the United Kingdom on behalf of all the people of the United Kingdom – wherever they live.

That has been the case since March; it is the case now; and will remain the case until next March.

It is a demonstration of the strength of the Union – and an undeniable truth of this crisis - we have only been able to provide this level of economic support because we are a United Kingdom.

And I can announce today that the upfront guaranteed funding for the devolved administrations is increasing from £14 billion to £16 billion. This Treasury is, has been, and will always be, the Treasury for the whole of the United Kingdom."

GP Appointments

As readers know from my last e-letter, I have been very concerned by the feedback from several constituents who have been finding it very difficult to make GP appointments by telephone. Instead, they have been told to go online to make the appointment - something which I believe discriminates against those patients who do not have ready access to the internet or who feel very uncomfortable about having to fill in forms about the nature of their ailments. I also question just how practicable this is for more vulnerable patients.

I raised this issue in Parliament and in the media only to be told by the Scottish Government that patients were still able to use the traditional method of phoning in for their appointment and that my concerns were scaremongering. However, having checked the details once again, I think the patients who got in touch with me are quite right to be concerned. It is clearly the case that in several practices patients are being advised that the first approach they make should be via the internet and that some medical staff are also concerned about this. I will be pursuing this matter.



Perth By-Elections



A week on Thursday, on 26th November, Perth City South and Perth City North wards will be going to the polls. We have two excellent candidates, Andy Chan and Aziz Rehman, both of

whom are local to Perth.

It has been a pleasure for me to be campaigning for both Andy and Aziz and I also want to thank all of you who have been helping with the delivery of leaflets or the addressing of envelopes.

May I wish them the best of luck on 26th November and may I also take the opportunity to send good luck to Denis Coyne who is the party's by-election candidate in Clackmannanshire East and who is contesting this ward on Thursday this week. He has an excellent team behind him too and I know my colleague Alexander Stewart has been working very hard to ensure Denis is elected.

And Finally, Vaccine Hopes



The news that there is a vaccine on the way is most encouraging and may I wish all those involved in the necessary medical research and logistical organisations all the best in their endeavours. It will still be some time until things will be “normal” again but this is a huge step in the right direction and something that was very much the focus for BBC Debate Night last Wednesday when I was part of the panel.

[Find Out More About Me Here](#)

[Perth & Conservative Website](#)



The Scottish Parliament Corporate Body is not responsible for the content of this publication or other internet sites.

I process personal data in line with my obligations under the general Data Protection Regulation. For more information, see my privacy notice here - <http://www.perthandkinrossconservatives.org.uk/privacy>