



Good wishes for Christmas and 2021

May I begin this final newsletter of 2020 by wishing my readers a peaceful Christmas- now just ten days away – and what will hopefully be a much better new year.

Perhaps the best present was the news that the vaccine had acquired the necessary clinical certification, that some vaccinations have begun and that it will be rolled out extensively in the coming weeks and months. Whilst it is clear that we are by no means out of the woods just yet, there is real hope that there is some light at the end of the tunnel. Maybe we can look forward to a little more normality in 2021.

If there has been a silver lining in the very dark Covid cloud, it has been the extraordinary spirit within local communities to help people overcome the hardships wherever possible. Mid Scotland and Fife is full of heart-warming stories and I want to pay tribute to all the volunteers who have given selflessly of their time in order to help others. Without them, I am sure some communities would be suffering even more than is currently the case.

Whatever your limited plans are for Christmas please do keep up to date with the latest Covid19 guidelines and travel advice especially if you are moving around from the 23rd to 27th of December. I hope you have an enjoyable time wherever possible.



Brexit

I was hoping, by this stage, that things would be a good deal clearer! But, the talking continues and that must be a good sign given last week's pessimism from both sides. The willingness to "go the extra mile" is, in my view, very welcome and I wish all the negotiators luck as they try to overcome the three main sticking points of fishing rights, the level playing field for trade and governance.

My first letter in the new year will say more!

Parliament continues for another week

The past two weeks have certainly been two of the busiest.

A few hours after the vaccine announcement, I wrote to NHS trusts in Mid Scotland and Fife asking them to publish as soon as possible their details for the regional roll-outs of the vaccine programme so that the public have maximum clarity on when they can expect to receive the jabs.

The same day, I asked the First Minister, to tell the Parliament what the Scottish Government was doing to improve the clarity of the FACTS message which, in the findings of the very recent Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, was found to be confusing. Obviously, public understanding of and compliance with government regulations is dependent upon clear messaging.



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Liz Smith MSP
Mid Scotland and Fife

Grant Archibald
Tayside NHS Board Headquarters
Level 10
Ninewells Hospital and Medical School Dundee
DD1 9SY

27 November 2020

Dear Grant,

SUBJECT: COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAMME

In light of recent days' correspondence from constituents, I am increasingly concerned about the lack of public availability of plans for vaccinating constituents across the Tayside area. I would be grateful if you could provide the following information urgently so that I can reassure concerned constituents that these preparations are well in hand.

Staffing

1. How many qualified staff are available to deliver the COVID-19 vaccination programme?
2. How many qualified staff are required to deliver the COVID-19 vaccination programme?
3. If there are not enough staff currently available, where will the staff required be recruited from? How many staff will be moved from frontline services to deliver the vaccine, and what impact will this have on primary healthcare services?
4. What discussions have taken place with the Scottish Government on the regulations that qualify staff to administer the vaccine?

Delivery

1. Are you confident you have sufficient storage capacity, including any specialist equipment required, to hold sufficient supplies for any vaccination programme?
2. How will the vaccine be distributed from central storage facilities to sites where the vaccine will be administered?
 - a. Specifically, how will the vaccine be delivered in care homes; GP practices; vulnerable people receiving care in the community; NHS staff?
3. What discussions have taken place with Scottish Government on the availability and operation of mobile vaccination teams?

I look forward to hearing from you.
Liz

The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP
Tel: 0131 348 6752 email: elizabeth.smith.map@scottish.parliament.uk

The Continuity Bill

The Continuity Bill (formally, the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity)(Scotland) Bill

Next week, the Scottish Parliament will move to stage 3 of the Continuity Bill. This is the bill brought forward by the SNP in June this year (and supported by the other parties with the exception of the Scottish Conservatives) to put in place post Brexit structures beyond the end of the transition period ie 31st December. The SNP introduced it to do three things:

- It gives Scottish Ministers power to keep devolved laws similar to EU laws
- It ensures Scottish Ministers and public bodies pay attention to environmental principles when they make policies.
- It sets up a new organisation to replace the oversight of environmental law provided by the EU.

Our objection to the bill is because it potentially hands far too many powers to Scottish ministers and, just as importantly, because it attempts to make Scotland “keep pace” with the EU law, despite us not being in a position to influence that law after we exit the EU.

We will therefore vote against the bill at Stage 3 but with the Holyrood arithmetic as it is, we will try to improve the bill along the way. I am responsible for bringing forward several amendments to part 2 of the bill which deals with the new body Environment Standards Scotland (ESS). I want to see this new body be independent of government and able to uphold the highest environmental standards. For example, I believe the long term and completely unacceptable “flaring” which has been a persistent blight on the night sky over Mossmorran, should have been sorted long ago, had the relevant environmental agencies had more teeth.



SNP's BiFab Scandal

Of course, Mossmorran is not the only major difficulty facing Fife. On 4th December, it was announced that the Bifab plant, which builds wind-turbine jackets, had gone into administration having failed to secure any more contracts. This was a major blow to the local economy and a sharp reminder of just how badly the Scottish Government botched the management of the £52.4m of taxpayers' money it gave to the company.

It has been a long saga of poor decision making and obfuscation. To add insult to injury, Bifab also made clear that its Canadian parent firm, JV Driver, repeatedly offered to offload shares to the company at no cost and it accused Scottish Ministers of making inaccurate and untruthful statements.

As Mid Scotland and Fife MSPs, myself, Murdo Fraser and Alexander Stewart all took part in the debate.

Persistent Failure From SNP On Education

According to FOI material requested by the Scottish Conservatives it has been revealed that fewer pupils in S5 are being entered for SQA qualifications than was the case in 2014. In 31 of Scotland's 32 local authorities, the average number of entries for Highers was down raising fresh concerns that subject choice is narrowing. Readers will recall several occasions last year when I expressed my concerns about the fact that two thirds of Scottish secondary schools were only allowing a pupil to take six subjects in S4 as opposed to eight which had been the norm. At the time, I warned about the knock-on effect this would have on S5 and S6 subject choices and that is now plain for all to see.



As well as this, we found out from John Swinney on Tuesday last week that he has cancelled all Higher and Advanced Higher exams. So much for the reason that cancelling National 5 exams was “to protect Highers and Advanced Highers in 2021”. Not surprisingly, this has caused an outpouring of anger from parents and many teachers too, especially in relation to pupils currently in S5 and S6 who will not have sat an exam before they go to college or university. The Scottish Conservatives did not agree with the Scottish Government’s decision to take this action. If England and Ireland can manage to organise their external examinations, including in areas which had much worse incidences of Covid19 than Scotland in 2002, then so, surely, could Scotland.

Lots of questions remain about this situation which is why I lodged some parliamentary questions, the most important of which are below:

- *TATSG whether the “exceptional, one-off payment” to teachers assessing and marking National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses in 2021, as announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on 8th December 2020, will be sourced from SQA fees or from general taxation.*
- *TATSG whether the “exceptional, one-off payment” to teachers assessing and marking National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses in 2021, as announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on 8th December 2020, will also include college lecturers and staff at independent schools who will also carry out this work.*

The SNP’s Budget Hypocrisy

I don’t know how many times during the last three parliamentary terms I have sat in the chamber of the Scottish Parliament and had to listen to Scottish Ministers blame all the woes of the Scottish economy on Westminster Ministers....for not giving them enough money. It must run into the hundreds of times when I have heard the SNP blatantly attempt to shift the blame onto someone else for what is categorically their problem. The hypocrisy is just as bad. Witness the most recent £2.2billion out of the £8.2billion of additional Barnett Consequentials for which the SNP took weeks to explain how the money is to be spent, thereby creating unnecessary uncertainty, especially for councils.

Rishi Sunak Answers Your Questions About His Recent Spending Review



And just to be clear, MSPs will not be receiving the April 2021 pay rise as planned (quite right too!).

Update On Alex Salmond Enquiry

It was buried in the news a bit as a result of the Covid19 vaccine story and the ongoing Brexit issue, but the MSP committee which is investigating the Scottish Government's handling of the allegations against Alex Salmond, took evidence last week from Peter Murrell, Nicola Sturgeon's husband and, of course, SNP Chief Executive. In that evidence, he contradicted Nicola Sturgeon's claim that the meeting between her and Alex Salmond in the Sturgeons' house was "party business." Mr Murrell said it was "government business". Both cannot be right! That is exactly why the committee is wanting to call back Mr Murrell.

This issue will continue into the new year, so watch this space, but, in the meantime it is worth saying that, under very difficult circumstances caused by SNP "obfuscation" and refusal to lay before the committee the relevant evidence, the members of the committee – of all parties, and Murdo Fraser included – have done a good job keeping up the pressure. Let's hope one day the truth will finally be revealed.

Hate Crime Bill-Stage 1

Tomorrow, I will be taking part in the Stage 1 debate on the Hate Crime Bill following the Justice Committee's publication of its report on the bill. This report is damning and reflects the very strong opposition to part 4 of the bill which, if enacted, would see huge restrictions introduced on free speech. That is why we wanted the bill withdrawn earlier this year and now, why we will fight against these deeply unpopular proposals.

For my part, I will be speaking about why this bill is dangerous and has undertones of the named person laws which I successfully fought against. Here are the opening lines of my speech and also a link to the committee report.

Back in September when we debated the Hate Crime Bill, I began my speech with the need to be mindful of the meaning of "good law" - the concept in jurisprudence which decrees that a legal decision is both valid and able to hold legal weight - not a law that has had to be overturned or rendered obsolete. Good law is one which is the basis for effective policy-making and, as such, it requires:

Clarity of purpose

To be understood in simple language

To be strong in its evidence base

To be workable

And, of course, to be accepted by the public

In short, it should balance the requirement for simplicity with legal precision and adhere to the highest standards of drafting and clarity of language.

And these are surely the criteria against which we should examine the Hate Crime Bill before us at Stage 1.

*Also, in the September debate, my colleague Liam Kerr set out exactly why the Scottish Conservatives had a real objection to some key sections of this bill especially in part 4. He did so because these parts of the bill would **not** do what the bill says it will do on the tin.*

Despite the good intentions, Part 4 of the Hate Crime Bill is illiberal, intrusive and deeply flawed. As such, it is deeply unpopular with a wide range of stakeholders – stakeholders who would not normally be united – and by the public at large because they can see these glaring flaws all too clearly.

Just like the ill-fated Named Persons legislation, legal responsibilities are confused and the

Scottish Government has not been listening to the legal advice or to the police or to the many stakeholders who feel that it will be an intrusion into privacy and personal choice. So, in short, and as Adam Tomkins and his committee have so eloquently pointed out, fair minded people can see that the bill as it stands currently is unworkable. Hopefully the Parliament will now change that.

Click Here: Stage 1 Report on the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill

My Autumn Newsletter

For anyone who missed my autumn newsletter please click on the link below, this will take you to the P&K Conservative website where you can download a PDF of the newsletter.

Link: Liz's Autumn Newsletter

And finally

Good Wishes for Christmas



Facebook



Twitter

Perth & Conservative Website

Find Out More About Me Here

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>