

Government must deliver economic growth – Laird

By Lesley Laird MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland

Delivering economic growth is one of the most important jobs of government. It is the driver behind higher living standards, better jobs and improved public services.

Without UK businesses flourishing, the UK itself cannot flourish.

The north-east as a region knows this better than most. The oil price crash over the last two years has hit great cities such as Aberdeen particularly hard.

Thousands of people have lost their jobs and firms large and small have gone to the wall.

Just as they have failed to grow our economy, neither the Tories or the SNP have properly addressed the oil and gas crisis.

A Labour government would immediately engage with the industry to develop a strategy to let the North Sea flourish for decades to come.

It would stop the premature decommissioning of vital assets by taking them into public ownership before selling them back when the oil price rises.

Labour would engage with unions to ensure offshore safety is the number one priority of firms – and that workers always get a fair wage.

These changes would help the oil and gas industry that has been callously forgotten by Tory and SNP governments for too long.

But it is also part of our wider vision for an economy that works for the many and not the few.

That was the vision articulated by Kezia Dugdale and Jeremy Corbyn that captivated Scotland and the whole of the UK during the election campaign.

People across Scotland and the whole of the UK are fed up with Tory and SNP austerity. They are fed up with tax cuts for the rich, while our hospitals and schools are left understaffed.

They are fed up with cuts to public services, while large-scale corporations get away with not paying their fair share in tax.

People want to see investment in our public services. They want to see economic growth because that is one of the most important jobs of government. Earlier this week, quarterly GDP figures showed the Scottish economy grew by 0.8 per cent. That is a huge relief – given the SNP had led us to the brink of recession – but it is not good enough.

The long-term trend paints a worrying picture of Scotland's economic performance, with the average annual change of just 0.5 per cent – a quarter of the UK-wide growth.

The rise in output from industries linked to the North Sea is of course very encouraging, but this is far from a vote of confidence in the economy, as Economy Secretary Keith Brown has claimed.

Scotland is far from out of the woods and SNP ministers need to drop their failed austerity agenda and redouble their efforts to grow our economy.

Businesses want and need certainty. The simplest thing Nicola Sturgeon could do to help our economy is take the threat of a divisive second independence

referendum off the table.

The Nationalists lost 21 seats at the election because Scots simply don't want to be dragged back to the arguments of the past – they want solutions to the problems of the here and now.

The same is true of the Tories across the UK. Like the SNP, they have refused to learn the lessons of the election and instead are pressing on with failed and rejected austerity regardless.

Make no mistake – I and my Scottish Labour colleagues will do everything within our power to hold this Tory government to account.

Theresa May's weak government – which exists only thanks to her grubby deal with the DUP – faces many obstacles and we will not let them continue on their current path unchallenged.

We will fight for a Brexit deal that protects workers' rights and business freedoms, ensuring no one anywhere in the country is made poorer.

And we will challenge Theresa May and her divided party at every turn to end their failed austerity agenda, invest in our public services and support the vital sectors of our economy, including oil and gas.

Economic growth is one of the most important tasks of government – and Labour will ensure both the Tories and the SNP put it at the heart of this parliament.

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