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Ruth Davidson will this evening call for a positive approach to the challenges and opportunities thrown up by Brexit – and a renewed focus from the SNP government on delivering lasting economic growth in Scotland.

In her David Hume Institute Lecture, the Scottish Conservative leader says that UK and Scottish governments need to work together where possible to deliver Brexit and to boost Scottish jobs.

She also proposes some ideas to help boost Scotland for when Brexit takes place, such as a new environmental court based in Scotland and a new system of agricultural support to support Scotland's rural economy.

An environmental court would simplify the current system – offering people easier access to environmental justice similar to the current Scottish Land Court.

On a replacement for the Common Agricultural Policy after Brexit, Ruth calls for a more streamlined system which ensures funding is directed to farmers in less favoured areas in Scotland.

Ahead of tomorrow's budget debate, she also warns that increasing taxes on ordinary workers in Scotland – as supported by the SNP, Labour, Lib Dems and Greens – will only deter investment in Scotland leading to less, not more, money for vital public services.

## **On economic growth, she says:**

“In December, the Scottish Fiscal Commission predicted a growth rate of less than 1 per cent until 2021.

“To put that in some context, research has found this is literally the lowest projected growth rate in the developed world – lower than every other OECD, G20 and EU nation.

“If this does indeed play out, the impact on all of us will be enormous.

“To give a flavour – after the Fiscal Commission revised February's projected growth rates down in December, it reduced our expected income tax receipts over the next four years by fully £2 billion.

"In other words, thanks to lower than expected growth, that's £2 billion less going into fund schools and hospitals – just as the very moment that an ageing population pushes the cost of public services ever higher.

"I would suggest – to put it mildly – Brexit or no Brexit, hard of soft, we need to act with some urgency – because increasing prosperity is the single most effective way of improving people's lives."

**On Brexit, she says:**

"While it may not seem like it – especially this week – there will be life after Brexit.

"There is no excuse for inaction here in Scotland.

"As the Fraser of Allander Institute has noted: 'With any Brexit uncertainty affecting the UK as well, it's hard to argue that Scotland's relatively weaker performance can be explained by the outcome of the EU referendum.'

"With Brexit comes new choices – and we must start actively preparing the ground to take advantage of those choices where we can."

"More importantly, with the huge powers at the Scottish Government's disposal, we must capitalise on Scotland's strengths in research and innovation to deliver lasting economic growth.

"We must look to ourselves – and if all we hear from Scottish ministers here is a counsel of despair, we will miss the opportunities which are in our grasp.

"We must ask how we can contribute, not recriminate."

**On an environmental court, she says:**

"Brexit does provide a moment when we can make these changes – to ensure that power is held closer to people in Scotland and the UK."

"Right now, environmental justice in Scotland is utterly inefficient – with some cases heard in courts, some by ministers and others in the Court of Session."

"Creating a new Environmental Court would allow the judiciary to develop an expertise in environmental law and science, helping to ensure people can get redress where it's right to do so."

**On farmers' support, she says:**

"We can take this chance to simplify administration in Scotland – so we can be spared a repeat of the IT fiasco we've seen over recent years."

"And we need a system that takes into account our specific needs. The vast majority of land in Scotland is classed as less favoured area. In contrast, for example, to England where it is only 15 per cent.

“So we will be pushing for a system in Scotland that really targets support for low income farmers in some of our most remote communities.”

“That’s support which, in many cases, helps to ensure that rural communities in Scotland can continue to thrive and can retain young people living there.”