

Freeman must appear before Holyrood to answer liar accusation

9 Mar 2020



Health secretary Jeane Freeman must appear before Holyrood this week to answer accusations from one of Scotland's top public officials that she lied, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Ousted NHS Lothian chairman Brian Houston said Ms Freeman wasn't telling the truth when she claimed she personally halted the opening of Edinburgh's new Sick Kids hospital, over-ruling the health board in the process.

In an explosive interview in today's *Edinburgh Evening News*, he also said Ms Freeman told him to resign or she would sack him over the fiasco.

The showdown came when the health secretary was under intense pressure for other failings across Scotland's health service, not least the significant delays to the flagship children's hospital, which was supposed to open in 2012.

Today, shadow health secretary Miles Briggs questioned whether his SNP counterpart used the Sick Kids crisis to create an impression she had a grip on the NHS.

Mr Houston said today: "To come out and say she was over-ruling NHS Lothian was a lie."

And he added: "We got absolutely zero engagement. The response from the cabinet secretary was contemptuous. She didn't argue. She didn't debate. She simply kept expressing and signifying her impatience and contempt. It was embarrassing."

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"Scotland's health secretary has been called a liar by one of the most senior public officials in the land.

"That's an incredible situation, and one which she must address immediately.

"We're demanding she makes a statement to Holyrood this week on the fiasco.

"It seems from Mr Houston's account that Ms Freeman – who was already under intense pressure because of other health failings across Scotland – used the Sick Kids crisis to show who was boss.

"That would be playing politics with one of the worst NHS scandals since devolution.

“And amid all this fighting, let’s remember that the new Sick Kids remains empty, and patients and staff have to endure conditions in a relic of a building nearly a decade after they were supposed to move.”

Another SNP ‘pay more, get less’ budget

5 Mar 2020



The Scottish Conservatives have blasted the SNP for delivering yet another “pay more, get less” budget for the people of Scotland.

With the traditional support of the Greens, a majority of MSPs are backing the widely-criticised proposals for the financial year ahead.

That includes a failure to fund drug rehabilitation beds, an under-funding of local authorities and a refusal to ensure no further tax divergence with the rest of the UK.

Shadow finance secretary Donald Cameron also criticised the Greens who, he said, had never demanded so much and received so little in return for their support.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Donald Cameron said:

“This is yet another “pay more, get less” budget from the SNP.

“It’s a budget that underfunds our vital public services, especially local councils.

“And despite the drugs deaths crisis, it completely neglects the wellbeing of vulnerable addicts who need rehabilitation beds to turn their lives around.

“This bad budget is being made possible by the Greens, who never in the history of this parliament have asked for so much and yet received so little in return for their support.

“This budget categorically fails to meet the needs of the people and businesses of Scotland.”

SNP ignored bridge ice warnings

5 Mar 2020



The SNP ignored warnings about ice build-up during the planning of the Queensferry Crossing, and now face a race against time to install them before next winter.

Shocking parliamentary responses have revealed that the SNP government were warned about the risk presented to the Queensferry Crossing from ice build-up on the cables.

In addition, the responses show that installation of the essential ice sensors on the bridge will cost taxpayers £430,000, and that motorists will have to wait at least 6 months for the sensors to be supplied.

These revelations were contained within written answers to Dean Lockhart, Scottish Conservative shadow business and transport secretary.

In the responses, the SNP government have admitted to knowing about the potential for falling ice on the Queensferry Crossing but decided that the issue would be best addressed by “weather forecasting”.

A further response states that the cost of the ice sensors is approximately £430,000 and that the sensors will take at least 6 months to be supplied. This means that motorists will not be protected from falling ice for the rest of this winter, and the SNP faces a race against time to install them before next winter.

As a result of ice falling from the bridge this winter, several cars were hit when crossing the bridge. This caused the closure of the bridge for two days causing transport chaos and severely impacting motorists and businesses.

Dean Lockhart, Scottish Conservative shadow business and transport secretary said:

“It really beggars belief that the SNP government chose to rely on ‘weather forecasting’ to ensure the safety of motorists.

“Now the SNP faces a race against time to get these essential ice sensors into place – at a significant cost to the taxpayer.

“Despite the SNP’s massive fanfare, this bridge has been beset by problems and snagging since it opened.

“The SNP clearly rushed to get this bridge finished and put the safety of commuters a distant second.”

SNP set for fresh tax raid on businesses

4 Mar 2020



The SNP is set to raid businesses for hundreds of millions extra in tax, the finance secretary has admitted.

In a note to Holyrood's Finance Committee, Kate Forbes confirmed non-domestic rates income would rise from £2.75 billion this coming year, to £3.42 billion by 2023/24.

That's an increase of almost 25 per cent, and would put hardworking businesses of all sizes and sectors under immense pressure.

The £670 million rise would occur as a result of business rates revaluations, the Scottish Government indicated in the document.

Shadow finance secretary Donald Cameron said the move was the latest indication that the SNP ran an anti-business government.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Donald Cameron said:

"Clearly the SNP government thinks it can balance its own books on the backs of hardworking businesses.

"Firms big, medium and small are already paying through the nose when it comes to various taxes and rates.

"This document shows the nationalists want to shake them down for even more cash.

"It's no wonder the business community feels neglected by the SNP government.

"Since coming to power in 2007, the SNP has made it perfectly clear it is an anti-business government.

"This raid will only drive away growth and help Scotland's closest competitors."

Free childcare pledge at risk over SNP's last-minute approach

3 Mar 2020



The risk of the SNP's pledge to expand free childcare falling short "is both very likely" and "will have a very high impact", a report has found.

Audit Scotland has found a number of issues with Nicola Sturgeon's flagship promise to ensure all three and four-year-olds receive 1140 hours of free childcare a year.

With less than a year to go, around half the necessary staff still had to be recruited to provide the care expansion, while just 30 per cent of linked construction projects had been completed.

And the 'Early learning and childcare' follow-up report – which will be published in full tomorrow – stated that half of the new places which would be created through fresh infrastructure projects were due to finish in July and August, the very month the policy is due to come into effect.

Auditors said the risk of the infrastructure challenges jeopardising the policy were "both very likely to occur and will have a very high impact".

The report also said councils would have to recruit more than 2200 full-time staff between April and September to meet demand.

Other problems for the pledge include "increased uncertainty" for those who are meant to deliver it on the ground, and the fact the SNP government hasn't worked out how to measure the success of it in the long-term.

Despite the SNP repeatedly demanding all businesses pay fair wages, the report said its very own scheme may not meet living wage requirements.

And in general, the impact of the overall scheme "poses risks to the sustainability of childminding", auditors said.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Jamie Greene said:

"This was Nicola Sturgeon's flagship policy, yet the necessary work to make it happen has been left to the last minute.

"As ever, the First Minister wraps herself in flagship announcements but the reality ends up being completely different.

"When judged on her actual record on childcare and education she fails miserably.

"As it stands, the fact we're still waiting for so many buildings to be

finished and staff put in place, there's a huge risk that this won't happen in time.

"Audit Scotland itself states the SNP's planning simply hasn't been good enough.

"The First Minister promised the world to thousands of parents across Scotland when it came to free childcare.

"They will deliver a very damning verdict on her SNP government if this promise isn't up-and-running on time.

"And what ministers seem to have forgotten through all of this is that good childcare isn't just about the number of hours on offer, it's the flexibility within that."