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- Sturgeon challenged over Independence “Austerity Max” plan

15 Jun 2018



Nicola Sturgeon is being challenged to admit that separation from the UK would mean “austerity max” for Scotland – following the publication of a new report today on the cost of her independence blueprint.

The report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies concludes that the SNP’s plans would lead to serious cuts to public spending for as long as 18 years after independence.

The report says it is “inconsistent” to claim that the SNP’s plans “do not amount to austerity but the UK Government’s current policy does”.

Yet, following the publication of her “Growth Commission,” Nicola Sturgeon has refused to admit that her plans would reduce spending on schools and the NHS.

The Scottish Conservatives are therefore calling on Nicola Sturgeon today to admit the obvious – that independence comes at a huge cost.

The report makes clear that extra cuts would be required under independence – but that the SNP Commission “does not say where the axe would fall”.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“Nicola Sturgeon wants us to believe that independence would come cost-free. Yet this impartial expert report makes clear it would be austerity max for as long as 18 years. That is the staggering price the Nationalists are prepared to pay for their obsession with breaking up the United Kingdom.”

“Nicola Sturgeon needs to come clean. She should simply admit it: independence comes at a huge cost. Until she does, nobody should believe a word she says.”

“This report only underlines why it is so important that we oppose a second referendum on independence. We don’t want to go back to yet more insecurity and turmoil – Scotland needs to go forward to a more secure, prosperous future as part of the UK.”

Farmers forced to borrow more

14 Jun 2018



Farmers are borrowing more and having to pay staff less, according to figures released by the Scottish Government.

According to 'Agricultural Facts and Figures' published today, agricultural borrowing has doubled in the last ten years, capital investment has stayed the same, and agricultural workers are earning £1560 less on average compared to last year.

The figures show that farm borrowing has almost doubled from £1.38 billion to £2.28 billion between 2007 to 2017, while capital investment has stayed the same at £210m.

This demonstrates that farmers are investing much less in their machinery and equipment, the Scottish Conservatives said, while still having to borrow ever-increasing sums to remain viable.

Scottish Conservative shadow environment secretary Donald Cameron said:

"The scale of the increase in farm borrowing, coupled with the lack of investment, clearly demonstrates the impossible situation farmers now find themselves in.

"The reality is that the SNP has no interest in rural Scotland.

"Its central-belt agenda has ignored and undermined farmers for too long, and this important sector is now stuck in a vicious circle, the effects of which will impact the wider rural economy too.

"With farmers still struggling with debts relating to the CAP payment fiasco caused by the SNP Government several years ago, they have been left feeling deeply uncertain of their future.

"This is leading directly to a lack of capital investment and farmers are – quite sensibly – reluctant to take on agricultural workers if they are struggling to pay them.

"The lack of any sort of plan from the SNP on farming support post-Brexit is also a major contributor to the fact that capital investment in farming is simply stagnating."

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13 Jun 2018



The Scottish Conservatives have today called on the SNP to “get off the ceiling and get back round the table” following the passage of the EU Withdrawal Bill through the Commons this week.

It comes with the Nationalists threatening to walk away entirely from UK wide discussions on Brexit, according to reports today.

Such a move would be deeply damaging for jobs and the economy in Scotland – and run counter to previous promises by SNP Ministers to support crucial new UK wide frameworks in key areas of the economy post-Brexit.

The Scottish Conservatives are demanding that the SNP confirm today they do not intend to withdraw from vital forums such as the Joint Ministerial Committees which help to deliver key projects such as City Deals.

The Withdrawal Bill will ensure that more powers are devolved to the Holyrood Parliament following Brexit next year.

Meanwhile, both the UK and Scottish Governments have previously agreed that, once we have left the EU, new UK wide “frameworks” will be required to replace EU rules to ensure that the UK internal market continues to operate freely and without friction.

Scottish Conservative constitution spokesman Adam Tomkins said:

“The hysterical reaction from the SNP following the passage of the Withdrawal Bill was entirely predictable.”

“But it is now time for them all to come off the ceiling and get back round the table.”

“There are crucial issues to discuss in short order. SNP Ministers have themselves agreed we need to design long-term UK wide frameworks in key areas to support jobs and the economy in Scotland. We need to get these discussions up and running as soon as possible.”

“The UK Government wants to talk. But the SNP seems only to want to shout and walk away from further discussions. Doing so would demonstrate once and for all that Nicola Sturgeon will always put her own political interests before

the national interest.”

“In particular, the SNP need to confirm today they will not withdraw from key forums like the various Joint Ministerial Committees. These are a vital link between Scotland’s two governments, and ensure important projects like City and Regional Deals are operated successfully.”

“For once, Nicola Sturgeon should ditch the nationalist grand-standing and get on with the job in hand.”

[Private sector jobs in decline under the SNP](#)

12 Jun 2018



Private sector employment has significantly declined compared to the same quarter last year, according to figures released today.

Figures contained in ‘Public Sector Employment in Scotland – Statistics for 1st Quarter 2018’ show that Scotland’s private sector employment has declined by 11,290 compared to the 1st quarter of 2017.

These statistics follow the latest Scottish labour market statistics, also released today, which show that overall employment levels in Scotland also declined over the last quarter.

The Scottish labour market figures show that employment in Scotland during this period has declined by 2,000 while UK employment levels have increased by 146,000.

Dean Lockhart, Scottish Conservative shadow economy secretary said:

“These figures are extremely disappointing for Scotland.

“The decline in private sector jobs is yet another sign that our economy under the SNP is stumbling.

“Yet again, we see the results of the SNP neglecting Scotland economy.

“The SNP has all the powers it needs to tackle this slow down and revitalise the Scottish economy.

“But the only economic growth plan the SNP has produced has been a blueprint for independence.

“The SNP must get back to the day job, stop obsessing about independence and focus on revitalising the Scottish economy.”

[Methadone implicated in record number of drugs deaths](#)

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12 Jun 2018



More than a third of people who die following a drug overdose are on substance substitutes like methadone at the time, a damning new report has revealed.

Analysis of drug-related deaths in 2016 revealed 37 per cent of the 865 people who lost their lives to an overdose were on such prescriptions.

And the vast majority of those had been receiving methadone for more than a year, the report confirmed.

That means 303 people who died as a result of a drug overdose in 2016 were already taking a substitute substance prescribed by the NHS.

That compares to 33 per cent (213) people in 2015, and 21 per cent (89 people) in 2009.

Today's 'National Drug-related Deaths Database (Scotland) Report' confirmed figures previously reported that the number of people dying as a result of substance abuse is on the rise.

It stated that the “rate is estimated to be the highest in Europe”, and revealed: “Further, the trajectory of Scotland's drug-related death rate suggests that deaths will continue to increase in the future.”

Most deaths in 2016 were male, although the trend of female fatalities is rising, accounting for 29 per cent in comparison to 21 per cent in 2009.

According to the data, 464 children lost a parent or parental-style figure to drugs in that year.

It revealed that 18 per cent of those who died – largely women – had been the victim of domestic abuse, while 77 per cent were already in contact with NHS and council support services.

The report also criticised the Scottish Government's Naloxone scheme, which hands addicts a kit to take when they think they might have overdosed.

It said: "Existing take-home Naloxone provision has not prevented substantial increases in opioid-related deaths in Scotland."

Fresh fears have also been raised about the role of so-called legal highs.

According to the report, Novel Psychoactive Substances deaths trebled within a year, from 112 to 346.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"These figures are hugely distressing, and prove the need more than ever for a new drugs strategy.

"Whatever is happening across Scotland isn't working, and hasn't worked for years.

"As a result, Scotland has the highest drugs death rate in Europe, and it's only going to get worse unless urgent action is taken.

"The fact so many people are being prescribed methadone, and then dying with it still in their system, is nothing short of a disgrace.

"This is what happens when you lazily park people on a drug-substitute with no prospect of ever beating the habit altogether.

"Any new strategy also has to take into account so-called legal highs.

"The fact the number of deaths from these new substances trebled in the space of a year shows us all the scale of that particular challenge.

"The Scottish Conservatives have consistently called for a new recovery-focused drugs strategy for Scotland.

"It's time SNP ministers got round the table to seek new ideas and interventions to address this tragic loss of life and the impact it has on individuals, families, and communities across Scotland."