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2 Feb 2017



The SNP's business rates hike has been slammed by its own party, after a nationalist north east branch was priced out of a hotel it's been using since the 1970s.

The Banff Springs Hotel in Aberdeenshire has been hit with a £50,000 rates rise thanks to Scottish Government changes.

As a result, it's been forced to pass on that additional cost to customers, or face going out of business.

And now it's emerged the Banff and Macduff branch of the SNP is one of those customers refusing to pay the increased rate.

It told the hotel: "The increase in hire fee is excessive to say the least. Should this apply ... I can confirm there will be no further booking and our business will be taken elsewhere."

The embarrassing revelation was raised at First Minister's Questions by Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson, as she attacked the SNP on its increasing of business taxes.

That move, along with income tax hits to be announced in the budget later, makes Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

However, instead of addressing the concerns shared by her north east branch, she merely said the hotel would have an opportunity appeal the rise.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"Even the SNP's own branches are opposing the hike in business rates, so perhaps it's time for Nicola Sturgeon to listen.

"These unfair increases, which see businesses like the Banff Springs Hotel paying more than double their current rates, could force closures and job losses.

"The SNP won't listen to reason or hard evidence, so perhaps it will take notice now it's been embarrassed in the Scottish Parliament.

“If the First Minister’s own party doesn’t support this policy, surely even she recognises it’s time to do something about it.”

To see the letter of complaint by the SNP Banff branch, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hotel-complaint.jpg>

The SNP organisation has been using the hotel since 1976:

<https://www.facebook.com/BanffandMacduff/posts/1104255902998301>

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1 Feb 2017



A cash injection aimed at cutting the country’s attainment gap should not miss out children in smaller schools who need it, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Shadow education secretary Liz Smith welcomed news that £120 million was to be released to schools across Scotland as part of Pupil Equity Funding.

However, she emphasised that some schools weren’t getting any money, and sought reassurances as to why.

It was announced today that 114 schools in Scotland won’t receive any cash, out of 2500.

But under a similar scheme in England, 133 schools out of 21,500 miss out, proportionately a far lower number.

Instead, she added, the Pupil Premium approach used by the UK Government might be more effective.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“This is a welcome move and will hopefully go some way to closing Scotland’s stubborn attainment gap.

“However, it’s essential no pupils who need it miss out on this cash.

“There does appear to be a higher number of schools in Scotland being left out than in England.

“Now the Scottish Government needs to provide assurances that this is because the money there is not needed, rather than a fault in methodology.”

For more on the announcement, visit:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-38816114>

In England there are 133 schools who do not receive any pupil premium at all, that’s out of around 21,500. Here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-conditions-of-grant-2016-to-2017>

In Scotland, there are 114 schools who don’t receive any Pupil Equity Funding and that’s out of around 2,500. Here:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/Raisingeducationalattainment/pupilequityfund/Schoolallocations>

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1 Feb 2017



The Scottish Conservatives have said they will talk “constructively” with the SNP ahead of the budget process, so long as it drops its plan to make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

Shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said there were serious concerns within the business community about plans to increase tax, something backed up today by the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, who described the plans as “dangerous”.

With the introduction of a large business supplement – as well as council tax increases and a refusal to adopt UK Government income tax threshold changes – the SNP will make Scotland’s workers and businesses pay more tax than anywhere else in Britain.

In contrast, the Scottish Conservatives want rates to be the same and, when possible, lower than in the rest of the UK.

The party has consistently argued that lower taxes would increase the tax base, meaning more receipts for government without hitting people in the pocket.

And with new powers arriving at Holyrood, the performance of Scotland's economy has never been more pivotal in providing cash for public services.

Stage one of the budget process will take place in Holyrood tomorrow.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"We will talk constructively with the Scottish Government's about its budget plans – so long as it abandons its bid to make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

"Derek Mackay needs someone on board to ensure this vital process goes through.

"It's the most significant budget in Scottish Parliament history, and we don't believe he should side with other opposition parties in hiking taxes for workers and businesses.

"Instead, he should come round to the idea that by lowering taxes – or at least keeping them in line with the rest of Britain's – he will boost the tax base, and help the economy in the process.

"And at a time when the economic performance has never been more significant for public services, the Scottish Government has to prioritise growth ahead of left-wing student politics."

[Tens of thousands of 'adverse events' in Scotland's dementia and geriatric wards](#)

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- Tens of thousands of 'adverse events' in Scotland's dementia and geriatric wards

1 Feb 2017



Dozens of “adverse events” are recorded every day in the dementia and geriatric wards of Scotland’s hospitals, new figures have shown.

A Freedom of Information request revealed 167,041 such incidents have occurred in the past six years as an under pressure health service attempts to deal with an ageing population.

The Scottish Conservatives said the data illustrates problems many vulnerable patients have encountered, as well as the daily challenges facing staff in elderly inpatient wards.

Incidents range from falls and assaults on staff to self-harm and patients absconding from secure facilities.

In NHS Borders, one staff member was injured while receiving training in dealing with aggressive patients, and in Fife there were reports of bomb threats and suspicious packages, as well as “rooftop protests”.

Much more seriously, bosses at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde said adverse events had resulted in the deaths of 49 patients since 2011.

In some cases, staff shortages were posing such a risk that employees formally logged that as an adverse event in itself, while in the Western Isles a lack of staff was blamed directly for allowing a patient to climb out a window and escape from hospital.

Shadow health secretary Donald Cameron warned these problems would become more commonplace as Scotland’s population aged, and cases of dementia increased.

The true figure is likely to be even higher, as some health boards were unable to provide the information, or supplied only the most serious of events.

Last year, it was revealed that maternity units across Scotland had also endured thousands of adverse events, prompting calls for an investigation.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Donald Cameron said:

“Patients in dementia and geriatric wards are among the most vulnerable in our hospitals, and deserve the best possible care.

“And there’s no question that wards dealing with dementia patients are incredibly challenging places to work: many of these incidents illustrate that.

“In such environments many of these adverse incidents will have been unavoidable, and it’s a credit to hardworking NHS staff that they deal with these day, in day out.

“But patients in these wards, and their families, will be extremely worried at the sheer scale of these flashpoints.

“There are a significant number of incidents which were put down to staffing shortages, or a lack of adequate resources and training, and that very much falls at the Scottish Government’s door.

“As our population ages and conditions like dementia become more prevalent, it’s clear something needs to be done to ensure these incidents don’t increase.

“We need to see a proper plan to make sure our staff and hospitals are equipped for all the future challenges they face.”

Below is a list of the adverse events recorded by health boards for the past six years:

Ayrshire and Arran – 15,043
Borders – 10,252
Dumfries and Galloway – 6399
Fife – 19,308
Forth Valley – 13,629
Greater Glasgow and Clyde – 270
Grampian – 16,426
Highland – 7073
Lanarkshire – 33,092
Lothian – 44,890
Orkney – n/a
Shetland – n/a
Tayside – no response
Western Isles – 659

Total – 167,041

Below is a list of the national figures broken down by year:

2011 – 28,239
2012 – 28,659
2013 – 28,317
2014 – 29,847
2015 – 28,906
2016 – 23,118*

Total – 167,041

**Some health boards only supplied information for part of 2016, which may explain the lower number.*

All details were obtained by the Scottish Conservatives through Freedom of Information. For a copy of individual responses, contact the Scottish Conservative press office.

Last year, it was revealed that thousands of adverse events had occurred in maternity units across the country:

[Ruth attacks SNP's 'bully pulpit' on Brexit](#)

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- Ruth attacks SNP's 'bully pulpit' on Brexit

31 Jan 2017



The SNP will be attacked over its “bully pulpit” approach to Brexit in a keynote speech tonight.

Addressing the David Hume Institute in Edinburgh, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson will say the nationalists’ behaviour “doesn’t speak of a party confident of its case”.

She will point to polls showing plunging support for a second independence referendum, and reports suggesting the SNP may be poised to ditch its long-term stance of keeping a separate Scotland in the EU.

Ahead of the Holyrood budget debate later this week, she will also stress that the Scottish Conservatives will not support any budget that makes Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson will say:

“In recent weeks, the SNP appears to have decided to double-down on its attempt to push for a second referendum.

“Now it’s not just about Brexit. Now, Mike Russell takes to the airwaves to declare that we need a referendum to escape what he describes as an ‘insular’ and ‘inward-looking’ Britain.

“Indeed, if reports this week are to be believed, for the SNP hierarchy it is no longer about staying within the EU at all.

“Instead, SNP sources are now proposing that an independent Scotland should exist in a no-man’s land, half-way between the UK and the EU, but part of neither.

“It’s a position concocted purely to try and win back the many thousands of SNP supporters who voted to leave the EU.

“And now, with support for a referendum falling off a cliff, the SNP is no longer saying the people should have the right to decide.

“Nicola Sturgeon says a referendum is something we all ‘must confront’.

“In other words, having failed to persuade people of the necessity of another referendum, the SNP is now hoping to soften us up by telling us we’ll just have to accept it.

“It is the language of the bully pulpit. The attacks on the UK are grave distortions.

“It doesn’t speak of a party confident of its case. It smacks of desperation – and I urge the SNP to take a different path.

“Or to put it another way – when you’re in a hole, stop digging.”

And on the Scottish Government’s budget, Ruth will add:

“We will have no choice but to oppose this week’s budget, unless the SNP agrees to examine its tax proposals once again.

“We will do so because we believe that taxes here should not be higher than in the rest of the UK – and, where affordable, should be lower.

“That would boost growth and add to the Scottish Government’s coffers.”

You can read the full text of Ruth’s speech [here](#).