

Fraser: Jobs boom would net SNP Government £800m

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7 Feb 2017



The Scottish Government would gain a near £800m budget bonus if Scotland's jobs market delivered for all working people, finance spokesman Murdo Fraser will say in a key note speech this evening.

Delivering his response to last week's SNP budget in a Reform Scotland lecture, Mr Fraser will call on the Nationalist government to focus on economic growth – saying it will deliver extra cash to the SNP Government's coffers.

Figures compiled by the party show that if all part-time workers who want a full-time job could get one, tax revenues to the Scottish Government would increase by £337m.

Similarly, if inactive people who want a job also found one, the Scottish Government would stand to gain by £435m in extra income tax.

Mr Fraser will say that this combined £772m windfall provides an illustration of the kind of budget boost the SNP would gain if it only prioritised jobs over tax rises.

The Scottish Conservatives have already shown that simply by increasing the proportion of higher and additional rate taxpayers to the UK average, the SNP Government would stand to gain £600m in extra revenue.

Instead, as part of a deal with the Scottish Greens last week, the SNP decided to set the highest income tax rates in the UK for Scotland – and failed to set out a plan to deliver economic growth.

In his speech, hosted by Shepherd and Wedderburn , Mr Fraser will say:

“As the Fraser of Allander institute point out: ‘Scotland’s economic performance – or more accurately, Scotland’s relative performance – will have a greater bearing on the spending plans of Holyrood than ever before’”

“To see what the potential benefit could be, we did some basic modelling, trying to understand what the impact would be if Scotland’s economy motored up a gear.

“If Scotland matched the UK proportions of higher and additional rate

taxpayers, tax revenues would increase by around £600 million.

“If every person in Scotland currently on a part-time contract who wants to go full-time could do so – revenues would increase by about £337 million.

“And if everyone in Scotland who is currently economic inactive and wants to find a job – but can’t – if they found work, revenues would increase by £435 million.

“These figures give you a sense of potential if we grew faster, and reached UK-wide norms.

“And of course – it’s not just me saying it. Alex Salmond, remember, estimated that matching UK growth would be worth £4 billion.

“I wonder what Alex Salmond would make of Derek Mackay’s budget.

“And I miss that old SNP.

“We might have had our differences, but at least we agreed on this guiding principle of government: if you want more money for services, start with growth.

“Bairns not tax bombs, you could say.”

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The SNP and Labour should become “born-again democrats” and accept the result of the EU referendum, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Speaking at a Scottish Parliament debate today – dubbed by Nicola Sturgeon as the most historic in Holyrood history – chief whip John Lamont criticised political opponents for seeking to reject the Article 50 process.

And turning on its head a nationalist accusation that the Scottish Conservatives were “born-again Brexiteers”, he said it was “time for the SNP to accept the result of the EU referendum”.

Today's debate brings the total number of hours Brexit has been debated to 37, compared with just eight hours on education, something the SNP claims to be a priority.

Scottish Conservative chief whip John Lamont said:

"The SNP is keen to call the Scottish Conservatives 'born-again Brexiteers', but perhaps it's time for the nationalists to become born-again democrats.

"They've been on the losing side of two recent referendums, and seem unable to accept the result of either.

"And with today's performance, it seems Scottish Labour aren't much better at accepting the will of the people.

"The Scottish Government should be focusing on getting the best deal for both Scotland and the UK.

"It should be looking for the right solution for Scotland's needs, especially on matters like farming, fisheries, trade and research support.

"We are entering a challenging time, with pitfalls to be avoided and opportunities to be seized.

"The next two years must not be about game-playing, grandstanding or political posturing."

[Stats reveal health board where 1 in 5 operations are cancelled](#)

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A Scottish health board was forced to cancel a fifth of planned operations in December, new figures have revealed.

ISD Scotland data showed, in NHS Highland, 19 per cent of elective operations were called off.

Around half of those were due to capacity issues within hospitals in the area.

Nationwide, 10.1 per cent of operations were cancelled, the highest in almost a year.

It is the latest set of statistics illustrating the difficulties being faced by the NHS around Christmas.

Health boards are continually failing to hit the four-hour waiting time for accident and emergency patients, while delayed discharge continues to be a problem.

Other reasons set out by ISD Scotland for cancellations are hospitals scrapping procedures for clinical reasons, and patients themselves deciding against going under the knife.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Donald Cameron said:

“Everyone appreciates the winter months are the toughest for health boards to deal with.

“But even so, for one in five planned operations to be cancelled is nothing short of dreadful.

“It’s a massive inconvenience for patients across the Highlands, many of whom are vulnerable and in need of care, and may well be coming a long distance.

“There will always be occasions when the patient wants to cancel the procedure, but this is clearly far too high a statistic.

“The SNP has been in sole charge of health for a decade now and this falls squarely at its door.

“NHS Highland has not had its problems to seek, and it’s essential these appalling figures are not repeated in future months.”

To see a spreadsheet of all cancelled procedures, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2017-02-07-Cancellations.xlsx>

[SNP rift over business rate hikes](#)

6 Feb 2017



Pressure is mounting on the SNP after two of its politicians voiced concerns over plans to significantly increase business rates.

Mairi Evans, MSP for Angus North and Mearns, and Stuart Donaldson, MP for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, both admitted that the SNP's Budget could result in serious issues for many Scottish businesses in the future.

After meeting with Aberdeenshire hotel owners last week, Ms Evans told the Mearns Leader that she will be "asking both Aberdeenshire Council and Scottish Government what actions will be taken to mitigate the impact of the new values".

Mr Donaldson meanwhile, said: "We met some of the local business people to discuss their concerns over business rates."

He added: "We both know how vital small businesses are to Aberdeenshire and how much of a driving force tourism is to the local community".

The comments from the SNP politicians are the latest evidence of the growing internal division within its ranks over the Budget.

Last week during First Ministers Questions Ruth Davidson embarrassed the SNP after she revealed that the SNP's Banff and Macduff branch had cancelled a reservation for room hire at a local hotel which had been forced to increase its prices due to the rise in business rates.

Scottish Conservative MSP for North East Scotland Liam Kerr said:

"The SNP rebellion against the rise in business rates continues.

"Last week, it was the SNP Banff branch which pulled their business from a local hotel after it was forced to pass on costs. Now two local SNP politicians have jumped on the bandwagon as well.

"I wrote to Derek Mackay last week demanding answers, but I have not had any response at all.

"When will he get it? Fresh from slapping the highest taxes in the UK on people across Scotland, he has totally failed to face up to the outrage from across Scotland over these staggering increases.

"As Ruth Davidson said last week, if even the SNP can't support these rate rises – isn't it time the SNP leadership did something about it?"

Please see a copy of the Mearns Leader article here:

<http://www.mearnsleader.co.uk/news/politics/mp-and-msps-against-business-rates-hike-1-4355327>

Economic think tank questions Holyrood budget process

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A leading economic think tank has queried the Holyrood budget process after it emerged the Scottish Government identified an extra £220million not included in December's draft budget plans.

In a blog published on its website, the Fraser of Allander Institute said that the sources of the additional funds – found just weeks after the original budget was published – are “as yet unclear”.

The Scottish Conservatives have said that the findings raise questions about the SNP's decision to strike a high tax deal with the Greens.

Murdo Fraser, Scottish Conservative Finance spokesman, said:

“This analysis from the respected Fraser of Allander Institute destroys any claim by the SNP that they have to charge people more tax than in the rest of the UK.

“Far from suffering from so-called cutbacks, it turns out the SNP Government had tens of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money squirreled away in their accounts. Instead of returning this to working families in their pay cheques, as they could have, they instead used it to buy off the Greens.

“The SNP could have worked with us to ensure Scotland does not become the highest taxed part of the UK. Instead they chose to do a deal with a Green party which, like the SNP, wants to take Scotland back to an unwanted referendum on independence.

“The SNP did not need to tax people in Scotland more, but it did so nonetheless. This will be bad for the economy and bad for growth.”

Link to Fraser of Allander report:

<https://fraserofallander.org/2017/02/03/boosting-the-scottish-governments-budget/>

The story is carried in the Sunday Times today:

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/scotland/scots-think-tank-queries-holyrood-budget-boost-t082k3lph>