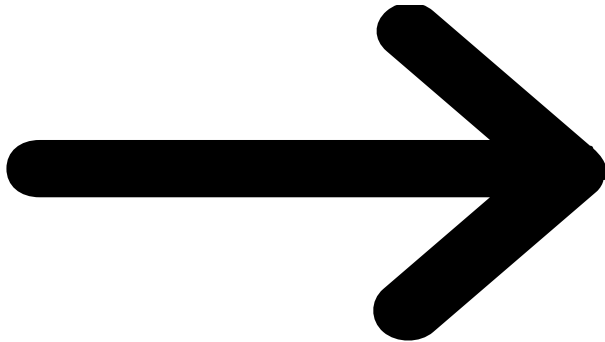


[SNP probed on ministers' indyref 'ring around'](#)

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14 Mar 2017



A series of parliamentary questions have been tabled to establish the extent of a Scottish Government minister “ring around” following Nicola Sturgeon’s referendum announcement.

It was reported today that ministers spent the day contacting companies and trade bodies to discuss the new break-up plans.

This is despite the SNP saying it is focused on the day job, and that areas like education and health are its “priority”.

According to reports, one recipient of a phone call said the minister in question was keen to “allay fears” surrounding a new vote, and that it might not happen until after Brexit was concluded.

On the same day, it emerged a school in education secretary John Swinney’s local area was appealing to parents to come in and help with maths tuition, such was the shortage of teachers.

And today, figures have revealed accident and emergency departments across the country – including at Scotland’s newest flagship hospital – continue to miss targets.

Scottish Conservative deputy leader Jackson Carlaw said:

“This is a farcical use of government ministers’ time when they are supposed to be focused on the day job.

“Schools are having to ask parents to come in and fill teaching gaps, people are waiting too long at A&E and Police Scotland is in crisis.

“Yet the SNP thinks the best use of senior ministers’ time is to embark on a

ludicrous ring around of businesses to put down a marker on independence – surely more appropriately a job for SNP party apparatchiks?

“Nicola Sturgeon’s statement that her government’s priority is matters such as education is now exposed as a lie.

“The SNP should reveal exactly who spent time on these calls, who they were to, what was said, and exactly what the nationalists thought would be achieved by making them.”

Reports of the ring around are here:

<https://order-order.com/2017/03/14/snp-ring-around-played-down-referendum-chances/>

Below is a list of questions submitted today by Scottish Conservative chief whip John Lamont:

TATSG to publish a record of all phone calls made between Scottish Government Ministers and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, CBI Scotland and other business organisations in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

TATSG to release all correspondence between Scottish Government Ministers and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, CBI Scotland and other business organisations in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

TATSG to publish a record of all meetings between Scottish Government Ministers and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, CBI Scotland and other business organisations in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

TATSG to publish all minutes of discussions between Scottish Government Ministers and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, CBI Scotland and other business organisations in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

TATSG to publish a record of all phone calls made between Scottish Government Ministers and financial organisations in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

TATSG to release all correspondence between Scottish Government Ministers and financial organisations in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

TATSG to publish a record of all meetings between Scottish Government Ministers and financial organisations in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

TATSG to publish all minutes of discussions between Scottish Government Ministers and financial organisations in the week leading up to – and

including – 13 March 2017.

TATSG to publish a record of all phone calls made between Scottish Government Ministers and the NHS, Royal Colleges and other medical stakeholders in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

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TATSG to publish a record of all phone calls made between Scottish Government Ministers and colleges, universities and other education stakeholders in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

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TATSG to publish a record of all phone calls made between Scottish Government Ministers and farming organisations, rural affairs bodies and other agricultural stakeholders in the week leading up to – and including – 13

March 2017.

TATSG to publish all correspondence between Scottish Government Ministers and farming organisations, rural affairs bodies and other agricultural stakeholders in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

TATSG to publish a record of all meetings between Scottish Government Ministers and farming organisations, rural affairs bodies and other agricultural stakeholders in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

TATSG to publish all minutes of discussions between Scottish Government Ministers and farming organisations, rural affairs bodies and other agricultural stakeholders in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

TATSG to publish a record of all phone calls made between Scottish Government Ministers and charities and third sector stakeholders in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017.

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TATSG to publish all minutes of discussions between Scottish Government Ministers and charities and third sector stakeholders in the week leading up to – and including – 13 March 2017

News story: Joint Forces Command celebrates International Women's Day

The special guest and keynote speaker for the event was Ambassador Marriet Schuurman, NATO Special Representative for Women, Peace, and Security.

JFC, which develops and manages the supporting frameworks for successful operations for joint forces in the UK and across the world, jointly hosted the event with NATO on Monday 6 March at its headquarters in Northwood, Middlesex.

The event was attended by approximately 100 people ranging from UK military, civil servants and defence contractors to military from NATO member countries. The key theme of the day was transformational management and

leadership.

During her keynote speech, Ambassador Marriet Schuurman spoke about the importance of gender equality. She said:

Gender equality for NATO is not optional; it is fundamental. It allows us to respond smarter and better to today's security challenges. Mixed teams perform better and smarter. Diversity is our strength.

The ambassador also referenced the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which recognises the disproportionate impact that war and conflict has on women and children. She said:

Resolution 1325 is an agenda for change, an agenda for sustainable peace and security by being inclusive.

She continued:

Every change process requires great leadership. Change always faces challenge and resistance. We must promote gender equality as a matter of effectiveness, and make it relevant for the security challenges of today.

Two panel discussions were also held to explore the themes of how leadership can be transformed and leadership challenges in a diverse culture with representatives from JFC, MOD and Foreign and Commonwealth Office leading the discussions.



A panel discussion at JFC's International Women's Day event on Monday 6 March 2017. Crown copyright. All rights reserved

Speaking during one of the panels, Vice Admiral Duncan Potts CB, Director General Joint Force Development and Defence Academy said:

Diversity and inclusion are very important because without a balanced number of women in our forces, we risk missing out on the skills and expertise of 50% of the population. It's really important that we get the right people into our services. And it's crucial that we reflect the values of the society we protect.

Andy Helliwell, Director of Resources and Policy, JFC said:

I am very proud that JFC is the first part of the MOD that has a more than 50% female civil servant workforce. We must strive to ensure that this continues and that we promote the benefits of diversity and inclusion to the wider MOD and indeed beyond other government departments.

SNP's new separation plans have 'unravelling within 24 hours'

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14 Mar 2017



The SNP's independence plans have "unravelling within 24 hours", the Scottish Conservatives have said today – amid total confusion over the SNP's stance on EU membership.

In interviews this morning, SNP ministers failed to spell out whether an independent Scotland would seek membership of the European Union.

It comes after Nicola Sturgeon was also unable to say whether an independent Scotland would apply for full EU membership in her press conference yesterday.

The Scottish Conservatives said the confusion only serves to underline the "reckless" proposal for a rushed referendum – which would force people to vote on "a pig in a poke".

It comes after senior EU figures made it clear yesterday that an independent Scotland would have to apply to become a member – even if an independence referendum was held before Britain left the EU.

This is also the view of leading experts who have said that an independent Scotland would have to apply as a new country to get into the EU after independence.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"The SNP's plans to impose a referendum on independence on Scotland have unravelling within 24 hours.

"Nicola Sturgeon is demanding that people are forced to make another choice on their future in as little as 18 months. And yet faced with reasonable questions about what independence means, she and her ministers cannot answer.

"We know Scotland will leave the EU along with the rest of the United Kingdom in 2019. Yet the SNP can't say whether an independent Scotland would then seek full membership of the EU or not.

"This is the opposite of the informed choice proposed by Nicola Sturgeon. The truth is she wants people to vote blind because she calculates this is the best way to increase support for separation.

"The First Minister is proposing the opposite of a fair, democratic vote – she is demanding that people across Scotland vote on a pig in a poke.

"The SNP is trying to have it both ways.

"It is demanding a referendum because of our decision to leave the European Union. But, in order to keep Leave voters on board, it won't say whether Scotland would seek to get back in."□

Below are transcripts from various SNP ministers on radio this morning:

Studio: You talk about clarity being very clear on that. How would an independent Scotland for example if it were to go that way, continue this relationship with Europe? Because that would surely mean a whole re-negotiation.

Fiona Hyslop MSP: Well, we have already set out a very comprehensive, technically detailed paper, how all of the UK could have a continuing relationship even outside the EU but continuing our relationship with the single market, so that is indeed possible. But in terms of the EU relationship future, much of course will depend on the views and opinions of our colleagues in the capitals and indeed the institutions of Europe. The European institutions are flexible and indeed the single market, the sheer size of that single market, means that a continued relationship is really important. The idea of having your very expensive customs tariffs in relation to our goods and services will be a problem for not just for Scottish business but for UK business. We want to make sure we can continue to trade with the biggest single market in the world and that is very important to us.

Studio: How would you continue that relationship? Presumably, you are imagining doing it, correct me if I am wrong, as an independent Scotland which would, as the rules are at the moment, mean a renegotiation.

Fiona Hyslop MSP: We are in a period of complete and utter renegotiation under Brexit. We do not know the terms of that. You are anticipating that I will know and anticipate what the exact details will be of our independence position, when we have the referendum, now that's sometime off and we want to make sure there's clarity on our independence position and our future relationship with the EU. A lot of it will depend on what state, what will be the state of the transition, if we get a transition from the UK Government in relation to exiting the EU, what will be the position of Scotland at the time the UK leaves? We want to make sure there is a choice before the UK leaves the EU and that is why we have that window of opportunity between autumn 2018 and spring 2019 but this has to be about choice. And that's what we want to offer the people of Scotland. We'll perhaps be the only part of the United Kingdom that can have a choice about whether this hard BREXIT deal is what we want or not

Nicola Sturgeon answer to Brian Taylor yesterday...

Question (non-verbatim) – are you assuming you can continue Scottish membership of the EU? If not, are you saying you'd definitely seek to re-join Scotland to full membership?

Nicola Sturgeon: What I'm saying today very clearly is that for Scotland to be in a position to **negotiate in a timely fashion our own relationship with Europe**, it's important that we indicate that desire and intention, before the UK leaves, or at the very least within a short timeframe after they do so. To leave it any longer than that would make that process more difficult. I do accept that that will be a process of discussion. **In terms of the second clause of your question, the SNP's long standing policy and commitment has been to membership of the European Union. Obviously we are in different circumstances now than we have been in the past, but that has been and remains our position. But on this issue, as on all of the many other issues that people will want to consider in advance of a choice, I've said very clearly that we will set out our proposition in advance of that choice so that it is an informed choice.**

...

Question (non-verbatim) – What reassurances do you have from other EU members that Scotland can be in or re-join?

Nicola Sturgeon: We have over the past 9 months been working very hard to influence the UK Government's negotiating position, and that has been partly as a result of some of the advice and feedback we've had from other countries across Europe, that if we wanted to seek a differential arrangement for Scotland then Europe would be open to that, but it had to come through the track of the UK Article 50 negotiations. So that has been our focus. Clearly we will continue to discuss with the other countries of the European Union and indeed with the institutions of the European Union. I know from my own experience across Europe that there is an incredible warmth of feeling towards Scotland, an incredible support, and a feeling that should Scotland democratically choose to be an independent country, then that is something that the EU would accept and respect and these discussions will continue no doubt in the months to come.

[Green Party Animal spokesperson welcomes vote to #EndTheCageAge for caged rabbits](#)



14 March 2017

Keith Taylor MEP: "This is great news for millions of rabbits across Europe and a great example of how the EU can take a lead on animal welfare. Greens

have always opposed factory farming and I wholeheartedly welcome the result of today's vote."

Green Party Animals spokesperson Keith Taylor MEP is welcoming the vote to #EndTheCageAge for farmed rabbits across Europe. The MEP for the South East was among a majority of MEPs who voted to support a report calling for the practice to be outlawed at the European Parliament plenary session in [Strasbourg this afternoon](#). More than 4,000 people across the South East had contacted their MEPs calling for action.

Rabbits are the fourth most farmed animal in the world. An estimated 340 million rabbits are slaughtered annually after a life kept in barren wire cages where their natural behaviour is severely restricted. Many scientists have called for the cage system to be urgently replaced by one which allows for the natural needs of rabbits to be better taken into account.

The report adopted by MEPs calls for higher welfare standards for rabbits and concrete legislation that would ban the use of cages. Responding to the result, Keith said:

"This is great news for millions of rabbits across Europe and a great example of how the EU can take a lead on animal welfare. Greens have always opposed factory farming and as the Green Party's Animals spokesperson I wholeheartedly welcome the result of today's vote. The report prioritises putting an end to the inhumane conditions in which rabbits are kept and eradicating the other problems associated intensive rabbit rearing. The current system leads to the spread of disease and the subsequent overuse of antibiotics."

"Rabbit farming is relatively small-scale in the UK, but the fact that the European Parliament has voted to end the cage age serves to highlight the key role EU membership has played and continues to play in raising the welfare of millions of farm animals in Britain and across the EU."

"The closer the relationship the UK maintains with the EU, retaining animal welfare and wildlife protections through single market membership, the better the outcome for British animals. Animal advocates across the UK must continue lobbying the UK government to ensure the current legal protections, for all species, offered by European Union membership are maintained and strengthened."

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Nicola Sturgeon isn't offering Scotland a say, she is offering false hope.

By Kez Dugdale

Just over two years ago, Nicola Sturgeon used the pages of the Daily Record to tell readers that improving Scottish education would be the driving and defining priority of her government.

So much for that, then.

After her speech yesterday, here is my message to Nicola Sturgeon : [Our country is divided enough, it should not be divided again.](#)

The vast majority of Scots don't want to replay angry arguments between family and friends.

Nicola Sturgeon should think back to those bitter arguments before she tries to divide us again.

Specifically she should think about how wrong she was then and how wrong she is now.

The SNP said the only way to have a fairer Scotland, to end austerity, was independence.

That argument has now fallen apart. The SNP's estimates for oil for the first two years of an independent Scotland were out by £21billion.

That's more than our country's annual health and education budgets put together. This isn't just about the black stuff – it's about the future of our schools and hospitals.

Labour warned that the SNP's plan was reckless at the time. The SNP Government agreed with us. In secret.

An official analysis paper prepared by the civil service for them outlined the cuts that would happen with independence.

Rather than release the paper, the SNP tried to hide it. The SNP knew the sums didn't add up. But they offered false hope, especially to the poorest in our country.

Nicola Sturgeon told people independence could end austerity, knowing that wasn't true. She knew it would mean even bigger cuts to our public services and told people the opposite on doorsteps.

That's not clever PR, that's misleading the country on an industrial scale.

Thousands of Scots voted Yes on the basis of a lie the SNP knowingly sold them. Nicola Sturgeon should be ashamed.

Two years on, she is ready to do it again.

None of the fundamental questions of 2014 have been answered. The SNP still don't know what currency an independent Scotland would have. They still can't explain how they would pay for pensions and there is still no reply to how our public services would cope with unprecedented cuts.

Even if oil revenues had not fallen through the floor, an independent Scotland would still have faced public spending cuts much worse than whatever the Tories have been planning. With thousands of Scots in need of a payrise, the SNP can't say what their wages will be paid in – and if they would be worth the same as they are today.

Having campaigned to remain in one political union last year, the SNP now can't explain why we should leave one which is four times as important to our economy and through which we built the NHS and the welfare state.

Just over two years ago, our country debated independence. It was the biggest democratic exercise in history. For two years there wasn't a pub, coffee shop, workplace or Facebook timeline without people having their say.

And after those two years of debate. A record turnout saw a staggering 85 per cent of people vote in the referendum and the answer was clear: Together, we're stronger.

That is why Scottish Labour MSPs will vote against a divisive second independence referendum at Holyrood next week.

We should be using the new powers of Holyrood to look to the future, which is why Labour will hold a People's Constitutional Convention to chart Britain's course for the next generation.

Labour want to see a radical federal solution that will mean more powers for the Scottish Parliament while keeping the security and opportunity that comes with being part of the UK.

That is a plan to unite our divided country. An alternative answer that will mean more powers influence and control not just to our Scottish Parliament but down to our own communities and right across the UK.

More than 200,000 children in Scotland live in poverty. Attainment in our schools is falling. Our NHS does not have enough doctors and nurses. Our economy is sluggish, jobs are too often low-pay, low- skilled and short-term.

None of these problems is addressed by a second independence referendum.

Only a nationalist could think they are, because their obsession with winning independence trumps everything else – even telling people the truth about independence.

The questions of 2014 remain unanswered.

The economic case of independence, which was tissue-paper thin in the first place, has collapsed.

Nicola Sturgeon isn't offering Scotland a say, she is offering false hope.

This article first appeared in the Daily Record on 14/03/2017

Agree with Kez? Sign the pledge against #indyref2

here: <https://www.togetherstronger.scot/>