

Queen's Speech criticised in Edinburgh



Commenting on today's UK Government programme outlined in the Queen's Speech at Westminster, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said:

"As I have made clear, the Scottish Government is willing to work with the UK Government on areas of common interest and where we can come up with constructive solutions to problems that we both face.

"However, there are evidently areas of fundamental disagreement between us – and the legislative programme set out in The Queen's Speech today could not demonstrate more clearly the divergent priorities of the two governments.

"The recent election victory has given me a mandate to lead a government with a progressive agenda, and indeed the wider make-up of the Scottish Parliament reflects that progressive view. This approach is at odds with the programme announced today by the UK Government that remains narrowly and obsessively focused on an agenda of austerity and does little to mitigate the policy's damaging effects.

"Continued austerity is doing nothing to help the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society and I am dismayed that there is no mention at all of how the UK Government intends to ensure our social security system is fair and fit for purpose so that we can provide a basic level of help for those who need it. Indeed, all of the signals on this issue point towards yet more cuts to welfare.

The First Minister added:

“The Scottish Government is firmly opposed to Trident and its proposed renewal – but the UK Government has today confirmed that, at the same time they are pressing ahead with austerity they remain committed to spending an obscene amount of money on a new generation of nuclear weapons based in Scotland. Nothing could more starkly demonstrate the different paths of the two governments.

“The Queen’s Speech also confirms that the UK Government intends to press ahead with plans to repeal the Human Rights Act. I have made clear that the Scottish Government opposes any weakening of human rights protections – not just in Scotland, but across the whole of the UK. My administration has been elected to take forward a progressive agenda – embedding human rights in everything we do, not seeking to erode safeguards which matter to everyone in society. And I have also made clear that UK legislation which attacks human rights cannot expect consent from the Scottish Parliament.

“However, I welcome the suggestion that UK ministers will work in co-operation with the devolved governments on matters of shared interest. Although we do not believe the Scotland Act has delivered in full what was agreed in the Smith Commission proposals, we welcome the additional powers and will work constructively with the UK Government to transfer them to the Scottish Parliament to allow us to use them to help improve the lives of everyone living in Scotland.”

✘ Deidre Brock MP for Edinburgh North and Leith has called on the Tories to stop their ideologically driven assaults on welfare and public services and start getting their own house in order – including more efforts to tackle tax avoidance.

Speaking in response to the Queen’s speech, Ms Brock, who sits on the Public Accounts Committee at Westminster, pointed to the billions of public money being wasted by the UK Government on mismanaged projects, as well as the annual £16 billion lost to the public purse from tax fraud and the £34 billion

tax gap.

Ms Brock said: "I sit on the Public Accounts Committee; we hear, week in and week out, of the most appalling failures to control government spending – not on social security or welfare benefits but on the pet projects that governments and ministers pursue.

"The electronic system for controlling the UK's borders, started under the Blair government, has cost tens of millions of pounds and still doesn't work. Trident has costs spiralling out of control – this time into the billions – and it hasn't even been agreed on.

"HMRC indicated tax fraud was costing about £16 billion a year and that there was a gap of about £34 billion between the tax that should be collected and what it's actually collecting, and a tax gap of £34 billion a year.

"That's where government efforts should be directed – at putting its own house in order; at collecting the monies due and not squandering billions on in-house incompetence.

"It's not the poorly paid, the disabled or the unemployed causing the problems – it's the government.

"Austerity isn't a necessity; it's a choice, a preference, of this government.

"The UK is being failed by its government and failed badly.

"This Queen's speech is merely the latest example and it's time the record was changed."