

#SP2021 – Scottish Conservatives launch their manifesto to stop another independence referendum

The Scottish Conservatives have launched their manifesto to rebuild Scotland together after the pandemic, and stop another independence referendum.

At the launch in Glasgow, Douglas Ross called on pro-UK voters to unite behind the Scottish Conservatives with their party list votes to “secure our recovery and rebuild Scotland together.”

In total, the document includes 15 bills that the party would seek to pass through the Scottish Parliament, “using the powers of the Scottish Parliament to their maximum, rather than complaining that they are never enough”.

He promised that if pro-UK voters come together, the Scottish Conservatives would stop an SNP majority again, stop their plan to “wreck our recovery” with another referendum, and deliver a Scottish Parliament 100% focussed on rebuilding Scotland.

He criticised Nicola Sturgeon for ‘taking her eye off the ball’ on every issue except independence.

Tune into our manifesto launch from 11am right here on

Twitter and over on our Facebook where [@Douglas4Moray](#) will outline our plans to rebuild Scotland. pic.twitter.com/xvrJ3H3q5Z

– Scottish Conservatives (@ScotTories) [April 19, 2021](#)

The Scottish Conservative manifesto homes in on securing Scottish jobs, and rebuilding the economy from the damage of Covid-19.

UNEMPLOYMENT

It includes the party's aim to end unemployment with plans for £500 Retrain to Rebuild grants to kick-start a skills revolution, Job Security Councils, Rapid Retraining Courses, an Enterprise Bill within the first 100 days of the new Parliament to establish an economic development agency in every region, a new Scottish Exporting Institute, and a 'Scotland First' approach to public procurement.

HEALTH SERVICE

It sets out a plan to focus on recovery and fully fund Scotland's health service with a 'double lock' to protect the NHS budget, a £600 million task force to reduce treatment times, and plans to reverse the SNP's centralisation.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL COUNCILS

It sets out further plans to restore power to communities with a Communities Bill that would introduce a 'Barnett formula for councils' and properly fund local services, £550 million of Community Investment Deals to drive local growth, and a change to planning laws to give local areas the final say over major

developments.

TRANSPORT AND POTHOLES

New policies include rates relief that would save the average shop more than £3,000, a £200 million fund to tackle potholes, scrapping public car parking charges to help revive town centres, and a homebuyers tax cut saving people up to £2,100.

JUSTICE

Douglas Ross said the manifesto “sets out the issues that the Scottish Conservatives will fight for in the next Parliament”, including protecting free speech by scrapping the Hate Crime Act, ending the SNP’s soft-touch justice system with a Local Policing Act and a Victims Law, and wraparound childcare to expand flexibility for parents.

EDUCATION

The fully-costed calculations behind the manifesto allow for investment of £1 billion over the next Parliament in tackling the attainment gap, as well as policies to increase teacher numbers by 3,000, tackle the ‘word gap’ at the nursery level, launch a national tutoring programme, invest £120 million in a Catch-Up Premium and introduce a new schools inspection body.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The manifesto includes detailed plans to tackle climate change with a Nature Bill, Circular Economy Bill, an electric vehicle action plan, £2.5 billion to improve energy efficiency in homes, and a target to plant 18,000 hectares of trees annually.

SOCIAL HOUSING PROGRAMME

It includes plans to protect the most vulnerable with the biggest social housebuilding drive since devolution, free school breakfast and lunches, eradicating rough sleeping by

2026 with a Housing First programme, and a new top-up benefit for veterans households in receipt of Universal Credit.

BROADBAND TRAINS AND ROADS

The manifesto includes an infrastructure plan to roll out full fibre broadband all over Scotland by 2027, reverse the Beeching cuts of the 1960s, and introduce a Uniting Scotland plan to improve roads all over Scotland.



Scottish Conservative party leader, Douglas Ross MP. Photo: © 2021 Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

In his speech to launch the manifesto, Scottish Conservative leader Douglas Ross said: “Good morning, it is fantastic to be able to speak to you today about the Scottish Conservative manifesto for the Scottish Parliament Election.

“It is a positive policy programme, focused on rebuilding Scotland after the worst year that many of us have faced in living memory.

“On delivering an economic recovery that stops widespread unemployment and creates good jobs and growth in every part of our country.

“On supporting our education system to catch up every single pupil from a year of disrupted schooling – so that we do not face the prospect of a Covid-generation left behind.

“And funding our NHS to get through the backlog of a year of

delayed operations.

“It is a programme that will ensure our recovery from coronavirus.

“Yet our manifesto does so much more than that, it sets out the issues that the Scottish Conservatives will fight for in the next Parliament.

“For renewing our justice system, so that it is firmly on the side of victims and not those who commit crime.

“For devolving power and funding to communities, so that we can put an end to the era of SNP centralisation and better support local services, like schools and roads.

“For creating a dynamic, innovative green economy, that works with business to drive a skills revolution and achieve our 2045 net zero ambition.

“And so much more.

“With our manifesto setting out 15 major bills that we would seek to take forward and pass through a Scottish Parliament working to rebuild our country.

“Using the powers of the Scottish Parliament to their maximum, rather than complaining that they are never enough.

“It is a manifesto that, at its heart, secures and accelerates our recovery from coronavirus.

“That uses the strong foundations and support of the UK to rebuild Scotland.

“Support which protected, at the height of the pandemic last year, over one million Scottish jobs through furlough and self-employed income support,

“Delivered an additional £13.3 billion to support our public services.

“And procured lifesaving vaccines, which have been rolled out to over 2.7 million Scots in just four months.

“It also harnesses that collective spirit, which saw communities pull together to help one and other during the worst days of the lockdown,

“And turns it onto supporting our public services and growing our economy.

“Yet it is a plan that could be put at risk with a second independence referendum,

“A referendum that would divide our country and damage our economy, just like it did in 2014.

“Nicola Sturgeon has promised that she will hold that referendum during the first half of the next Parliament,

“While Scotland is still in the “recovery phase” from coronavirus.

“She said on Thursday that it was her “duty” as First Minister to hold an independence vote.

“Let’s just think about that.

“She said that failure to hold another independence referendum after the election would “be a dereliction of my duty as First Minister”.

“That is incredible.

“Allowing Scottish education to plummet from the best in the world to internationally average, that is a dereliction of duty.

“Failing to meet your legal NHS treatment time guarantee at any time since it was introduced nine years ago, that is a dereliction of duty.

“Taking your eye off the ball and allowing drug deaths to double since you became First Minister, that is a dereliction of duty.

“But instead, Nicola Sturgeon believes that she will have failed in her job as First Minister if she does not hold another referendum.

“That is the measure by which she will judge if she has succeeded at the end of her term.

“Not on the number of jobs and businesses that she saved, as the full effects of restrictions hits Scotland’s economy in the months and years ahead.

“Not on the educational performance of Scottish children against previous years.

“But on whether she held another referendum.

“So, we can be in no doubt that Nicola Sturgeon will do everything she can to get that vote.

“From battling the UK Government in the courts, to holding an illegal, wildcat vote.

“Independence will be the SNP’s priority.

“If they are elected with a majority, they will take that mandate as free rein to drive forward their obsession at the earliest opportunity.

“We cannot trust the SNP to deliver our recovery.

“We cannot rebuild Scotland, while we are crippled by the threat of an independence referendum.

“So we need to take that threat off the table.

“We need to ensure the Scottish Parliament is laser-focused on our national interest right now, not party-political

priorities.

“We need to prevent the SNP from winning a majority, from having total control.

“And it is only by voting for the Scottish Conservatives, that we can achieve this.

“In 2016, half a million Scots gave their party list vote to us and together we stopped an SNP majority that all the pundits believed was inevitable.

“Just like last time, Nicola Sturgeon thinks she has got this election in the bag.

“But if we come together again, we can prove her wrong again.

“We can prevent an SNP majority and win a Scottish Parliament working in our national interest.

“Which will allow all of Scotland’s parties to focus on helping our country to rebound from coronavirus.

“On protecting and creating jobs, supporting and investing in our public services.

“And in that Parliament, the Scottish Conservatives will look to deliver on as much of our ambitious plan to rebuild Scotland as we can.

“A plan that starts with our economy.

“Because with unemployment forecast to almost double in the coming months, we need to kickstart our economic recovery to deliver new opportunities.

“Which is why our manifesto sets out that our number one priority for the next Parliament will be creating jobs.

“Striving to build a Scottish economy with full employment at its heart.

“To do this, we will invest in a network of Job Security Councils, to help those who have been made newly unemployed find new opportunities.

“And we will give everyone in Scotland access to a £500 Retrain to Rebuild grant every year, for upskilling and re-skilling.

“Underpinned by a programme of new bite-sized, intensive Rapid Retraining Courses, for those people who want to quickly get the qualifications they need to move into a new career.

“Delivering opportunity for every Scot, giving them the tools they need to succeed.

“Then we need to support businesses to recover and create those jobs.

“After many have been shut for months and some for the entirety of the pandemic.

“So, with the public health data showing that it is safe to do so, we would lift restrictions and get our economy open faster.

“But we would also keep business rates low and continue Covid-reliefs into next year.

“And we will work towards reforming our archaic rates system by the end of the Parliament, so that it reflects our modern economy.

“While we are on the subject of tax, when public finances allow, we would put an end to the SNP’s higher income tax and restore parity with the rest of the UK, increasing the pay packets of 1.1 million Scottish workers.

“We will also invest in the infrastructure that Scotland needs for future growth.

“From rolling full fibre broadband to every single home and business in the country by 2027.

“Expanding our major roads, investing in hydrogen networks and accelerating our electric vehicle rollout.

“To fixing potholes, getting local railway lines and stations, closed for decades, back up and running and delivering new cycle paths.

“We will get Scotland moving again with a transformative upgrade to our transport network.

“But we would also ensure, in the year of COP26 in Glasgow, that our recovery is a green recovery.

“One that puts us on the road to achieving net zero in 2045.

“We will take forward a Circular Economy Bill to improve how we reuse and recycle materials.

“We will invest £2.5 billion to make our homes and workplaces energy efficient and create 24,000 jobs.

“We will better protect our environment with a Cleaner Seas Fund, increased tree planting and establishing Scotland’s third national park in Galloway.

“And unlike other parties in this election, we will stand up for the oil and gas sector and support the UK Government’s North Sea Transition Deal to secure 40,000 jobs.

“But we will not just rebuild Scotland’s economy but also every single community in our country.

“As I said, the Scottish Conservatives will end the era of SNP centralisation.

“We will defend local decision making and give councils a Barnett-style funding settlement that stops the Scottish Government raiding their budgets to fund national projects.

“Protecting our schools, our local roads, community buildings and bin collections.

“We will support our high streets and town centres to recover from this pandemic with tax breaks and scrapping parking charges.

“We will roll out a programme of community investment deals worth £25 million each and a national public gardens strategy, while protecting Green Belts.

“We will make it easier and cheaper to buy a house by building 60,000 affordable homes, reinstating Help to Buy and cutting the tax on every home purchase by up to £2,100.

“We will better support unpaid carers by improving the Carers Allowance with the introduction of a taper rate and extend payments of Carers Allowance to up to six months after bereavement.

“And we will make Scotland a land fit for veterans and their families, by guaranteeing their access to services and housing.

“As the party of rural Scotland, we will ensure that rural communities are not always the last to see essential infrastructure and investment.

“We will work with farmers to design a new payment system that puts supporting them to farm at its heart.

“And we will crack down on rural crime and increase fines on littering and fly-tipping and use the increased income to support clearing up and enforcement.

“Then there is our National Health Service.

“The NHS has always been an important part of our society but over the past year we have had to rely on it and the amazing staff who work there like never before.

“So, to thank our NHS, we would deliver a record £2 billion increase in its budget over the next five years.

“And give an additional £600 million this year to medical professionals for tackling the backlog of operations and treatment.

“Going forward, we will put local treatment back at the heart of our health service.

“With a presumption against centralisation and the closure of services that communities rely on.

“We will increase the proportion of the NHS budget that is spent on GP and mental health services.

“So that we can better respond to the current demand for healthcare and reduce the pressure on overstretched A&E departments.

“We will double funding on sports to get Scotland back into shape after a year of lockdowns and restrictions.

“A little selfishly I’ll admit highlighting just one sport, we will back the UK bid to host the 2030 football World Cup and stretch every sinew to get the final in Glasgow.

“As we recover from this crisis, we need to restore Scottish education, to make every school a good school and give our children the same great start in life that previous generations enjoyed.

I want my son and every child in Scotland to be able to have an education that gives them the skills they need whatever they choose to do.

“One that recognises that success comes in all shapes and sizes and that achievement means something different to every child.

“We would invest £120 million this year into a catch-up premium for every school child and set up a national tutoring programme for those children in most need of support.

“And over the Parliament we will give £1 billion directly to schools for tackling the attainment gap.

“To end the SNP’s cuts to teacher numbers, we will recruit an additional 3,000 teachers.

“We would allow every primary school child a free school lunch and breakfast, because as the son of a school cook, I know the importance of nutritious meals to a child’s learning.

“And we would rollout wraparound childcare, to allow kids to take part in exciting out of school activities and support their parents to keep a full-time job when their child starts school.

“However, while we are focused on our recovery, we cannot ignore the massive problems in our justice system.

“Issues that have only got worse with an SNP Government that has taken a soft touch approach to tackling crime.

“With violent crime increasing by 49% since Nicola Sturgeon became First Minister.

“So, the very first bill we will introduce in the next Parliament would be a Victim’s Law.

“Which would strengthen the rights of victims and their families and abolish the Not Proven verdict – giving both the accuser and the accused proper closure.

“We would end automatic early release, introduce whole life sentences and remove the right of prisoners to vote.

“We would back our police with the resources they need and ensure that we get more officers on our streets.

“And we will stand up for free speech, by bringing forward a law to repeal the Hate Crime Act.

“Putting an end to the most controversial piece of legislation in the history of our Parliament.

“That is just a short overview of the many policies that are contained in this manifesto.

“A manifesto, not just to rebuild our country from the coronavirus pandemic,

“But also, to begin to undo the damage of 14 years of SNP failure.

“We can achieve all of this and so much more over the next five years.

“In a Scottish Parliament focused on our national interest, parties will be able to deliver on their programmes by working together to rebuild Scotland.

“Yet we will have none of that if the SNP win a majority and take us through another divisive independence referendum.

“We need to get on the road to recovery.

“We need to ensure that we do not leave behind a lost Covid-generation and that we heal the damage that the pandemic has done to our economy and society.

“We need to choose to rebuild Scotland now.

“And the only way to do that in this election is to vote Scottish Conservative with your party list vote on the 6th of May.

“Even if you have never thought of yourself as a Conservative or have never voted for us before.

“Only the Scottish Conservatives have the strength across the

country to stop the SNP from winning a majority and wrecking our recovery with a second referendum.

“Labour and the Liberal Democrats believe that they can just wish the threat of a second referendum away.

“That after the election, Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP will just give up on their lifelong obsession.

“We know that nationalists will never do that.

“We offered in good faith to work with other parties but they are intent on ignoring the elephant in the room.

“Anas Sarwar and Keir Starmer will not even say if they will oppose an independence referendum the day after the election.

“The same old Labour, unwilling and unable to stand up to the nationalists.

“So, it falls upon us. To take the fight to the SNP and say no to their plans to wreck our recovery.

“To get our Scottish Parliament 100% focused on the task of rebuilding our country after the pandemic.

“We can do this together.

“If pro-UK voters unite behind the Scottish Conservatives, then we can stop an SNP majority, we have done it before,

“So, let’s now come together in the national interest.

“Let’s keep our country united and focused on the task at hand.

“Let’s get on the road to recovery and not allow the SNP to divert us with another independence referendum.

“Let’s move Scotland on from the damage of coronavirus and the division of the past decade.

“Let’s secure our recovery and rebuild Scotland together.”