

BRENDAN O'HARA MP

Constituency Newsletter March 2017

SCOTLAND RAILROADED INTO BREXIT ABYSS

Amid angry scenes on the floor of the House of Commons and despite 58 of Scotland's 59 MPs voting against Article 50, the UK government railroaded their EU Withdrawal Bill through parliament in February. With little debate and having refused to accept a single amendment, the Tories showed their contempt for the democratically expressed will of the Scottish people as Theresa May reneged on her promise not to trigger Article 50 without securing "an agreed UK-wide approach". We now face the awful prospect of being dragged out of the European Union and off of Mrs May's hard-Brexit cliff edge against our will.

SNP MPs ON INTERNATIONAL DUTY



In the last few weeks I have had a series of very useful meetings with the Norwegian, the Finnish and the Danish military attachés at Westminster to discuss the developing situation in the High North and Arctic. I also had a couple of very interesting meetings with the deputy ambassador from the UAE, Ms. Rawdha M J M Alotaiba (pictured above) and her senior defence attaché, whose first priority after arriving in the UK was, "What's happening in Scotland?" Following our meeting, the deputy ambassador contacted me again and invited me to meet with the UAE government in Abu Dhabi and Dubai in April.

ISTANBUL CONVENTION BECOMES LAW THANKS TO SNP MP

Last Friday, despite some absolutely shameful attempts to filibuster from a few Tory MPs, Eilidh Whiteford's Private Members Bill passed into law. Eilidh's Bill, the first piece of SNP-led legislation to make it through the House of Commons and onto the statute books, commits the UK government to ratify the Istanbul Convention on violence against women; something they said they'd do back in 2012. In the end, thanks to cross-party support, the landmark legislation was passed by 138 to one.



NATIONAL SHIPBUILDING STRATEGY

After months of delays to the National Shipbuilding Strategy, we finally managed to hold the government to account earlier this month when our



request for a debate on the issue was granted. Although I closed the debate for

the SNP, it was a fine all-round team performance with excellent contributions from Douglas Chapman, Steven Paterson, Chris Stephens as well as telling interventions from Kirsten Oswald, Martin Docherty-Hughes Carol Monaghan. Although there is still no sign of the National Shipbuilding Strategy, we have at least exposed the government's abject failure.

SPEAKING UP FOR THE UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

Often in the past two years, I have been left absolutely speechless by the



callous nature of this government's policies. For me however, their decision to slash the number of unaccompanied children allowed to resettle in the UK from 3000 to just 350, was a new low. It was always my intention to attend the debate last Thursday to record my opposition to what they were doing but having attended a screening of Ross Kemp's latest film



Libya's Migrant Hell a film that exposed the unspeakable horror faced by people trying to reach Europe via Libya, I felt compelled to speak out against this particularly appalling u-turn.

SNP DEFENCE TEAM VISIT HOLYROOD



At the start of the month the entire SNP Westminster Defence Team went to Holyrood to meet with our MSP colleagues. As defence is an entirely reserved issue, we have no direct counterparts within the Holyrood group, so with the importance of defence in our ongoing constitutional debate, we took the team to meet our MSP colleagues to explain how we have been formulating policy, engaging with foreign governments and holding the UK government to account. It was a very useful presentation and one we will be repeating for delegates and members at a fringe event during Spring Conference in Aberdeen on 17th March.

HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD FOR MAGNUS

It's not every day the great work of a constituent is rewarded at a ceremony by Westminster parliamentarians. Last week I joined Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, the co-founder of Mary's Meals when he received the 2017 Westminster Award for Human Life,

Human Rights and Human Dignity. This highly prestigious award recognises Magnus' remarkable contribution to alleviating child hunger and improving the life chances for children in 12 of the poorest countries across South and Central America, Africa, India and Asia by providing more than one million children with a hot meal every day at school. Congratulations to Magnus and everyone at Mary's Meals. A richly deserved award.



WORKING TOGETHER FOR CS WIND

On Saturday I met with senior management at CS Wind to discuss their proposal to make 54



people redundant at their Machrihanish factory. Days earlier at Westminster, I accused the UK Government of cutting the legs from the onshore wind industry with absolutely no regard for fragile rural economies such as ours. As well as meeting with CS Wind, I have been in contact with the Trades Unions, HIE, the Scottish Government, as well as UK Ministers and I will be making a submission to the UK's Industrial Strategy. It is absolutely essential that CS Wind stay and prosper at Machrihanish and I was encouraged to learn that the contract for 95 giant offshore towers is going ahead as planned, guaranteeing the 100 remaining jobs at the factory. I fully understand that these are difficult times for everyone, particularly those about to lose their job but I believe that with the right political environment, CS Wind and Kintyre can prosper from the renewable energy sector.

LIFE AFTER TRIDENT

I was honoured to be one of the keynote speakers at a really well attended Helensburgh CND conference at the start of February. I was asked to speak then lead a discussion



on the role the Faslane base would play, post-Trident. I made it absolutely clear that Faslane will have a pivotal role to play as a conventional naval base in an independent Scotland and will be the HQ for a future Scottish Defence Force. What it won't be is a dumping ground for the UK's weapons of mass destruction.

ARCTIC TRAINING WITH ROYAL MARINES

As the party's Front Bench defence spokesperson, I took the opportunity during February recess to broaden my knowledge and get some hands-on experience by joining the Royal Marines at their winter survival training camp inside the



Arctic Circle. As well as learning the basics of cross-country skiing, how to build a survival shelter and fire in the forest and how to survive a night under canvas in sub-zero temperatures, I also bumped into a constituent, Dave from Helensburgh. And in what must count as the strangest surgery ever, there we were standing in the Arctic discussing how good Colquhoun Square is looking these days and debating what the best Chippie in Helensburgh is. It was a wonderful experience and huge thanks to the Royal Marines for making it happen.

QUESTION TIME AT OBAN HIGH SCHOOL

One part of this job I particularly love is visiting schools. So I jumped at the chance to have a Q&A session with the Higher Modern Studies classes at Oban High

School. Our discussion covered everything from life as an MP, a second



independence referendum, Brexit, the work of Select Committees, through to who you would rather be stuck on a desert island with, Willie Rennie, Kezia Dugdale or Ruth Davidson? I'll leave you to guess the answer. It was great fun. Thanks to all the staff and pupils for the warm welcome and I look forward to doing it again soon.

CONNECTING OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES...THE FAROESE WAY

A few days ago I went to Holyrood with my parliamentary colleague Angus Brendan MacNeil MP and the Faroese representative to the UK, Mr Aki Johansen. We were in Edinburgh for a meeting with Transport Minister Humza Yousaf, to see what Scotland can learn from the Faroe Islands in terms of connecting remote and island communities with



undersea tunnels. To date, the Faroese have 19 tunnels connecting all of their main islands, with others under

construction. As MPs with so many islands in our respective constituencies, both Angus Brendan and I were very keen to learn from the Faroese and hope to visit the Faroe Islands with Humza very soon.

SUPERMARKET SURGERIES REMAIN IN GOOD HEALTH



A big thank you once again to Tesco in Oban for providing the floor space for my latest supermarket surgery. As is becoming the norm, there were no formal appointments booked but within minutes of setting up the table just inside the front entrance, I was inundated with folk wanting to talk to me. Over the course of the 90 minutes I was there, I must have been seen by hundreds of people, picked up five new constituency cases and chatted with dozens of people who certainly didn't expect to bump into their MP while out for their weekend messages.

CAMERON'S BRAVERY REWARDED

A couple of weeks ago I was lucky enough to meet an incredibly brave young man, Cameron Allen. Cameron, who is just 15 and lives near Appin, has brittle bone disease and in his young life has suffered approximately 350 bone fractures.



Indeed when we arrived, Cameron was in plaster having broken his leg earlier that day. But despite all he has had to put up with, a happier, cheerier, more positive boy you couldn't hope to meet. I had arranged to meet Cameron to discuss his fundraising for a new wheelchair but I was delighted to learn from his mum that just about an hour before I arrived, she had received a call saying that the £20,000 target had been reached and, all being well Cameron will get his new chair very soon.

COUNCIL CAMPAIGNING UNDERWAY

As it is across the constituency, the campaign to wrest control of Argyll & Bute Council from the Tories and Lib Dems is well underway in Helensburgh and Lomond. Earlier this week I was delighted to join a squad of activists delivering the first leaflet.



WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?

I am astonished that the MoD and Argyll and Bute Council think the best way to attract Navy personnel to the area was with a nuclear submarine. Glad to see that many others thought the same with almost 400 retweets – what were they thinking? ...were they thinking?

