

Brendan O'Hara MP



SNP

**January
2019**

As Brexit looms ever closer, so the chaos engulfing Westminster deepens. With a Prime Minister held hostage by the far-right of her party, a Labour leader now actively enabling Brexit and both parties haemorrhaging MPs to the new Independent Group, there is an End of Days feeling about the place at the moment. Thankfully your SNP MPs are there making the positive case for an independent Scotland in Europe, day in, day out.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brendan O'Hara'.

PM'S CYNICAL BREXIT BLACKMAIL PLOY WON'T WORK



EVEN by the standards of chaos that has enveloped Westminster in the last year or so, the past couple of weeks have been absolutely extraordinary. We now have a wretched government reduced to trying to blackmail MPs into backing the Prime Minister's disastrous Deal; the deal they overwhelmingly rejected in January...by an unprecedented majority! Despite this historic defeat, the Prime Minister believes that by cynically running down the clock towards a No Deal Brexit on March 29th, MPs will be scared into supporting her. It really is hard to imagine a more contemptuous and shameful ploy for a government to try and pull when seeking

to impose its will on parliament. Publically, the Prime Minister still claims to be renegotiating with the European Union about reopening the Withdrawal Agreement to amend details around the Northern Ireland backstop. But she knows it won't happen, because the EU have told her, unequivocally that they will not open up the Withdrawal Agreement. So while she may go through the motions of discussing with the other leaders, her plan is to hold out for as long as she can and, as the Brexit date gets closer, hope that those who initially opposed her Deal will flock to support it, simply for fear of something worse happening. It is an appalling way to run a country and the sooner Scotland is out of it, the better.

Faroes visit: is it now time to tunnel?

FOLLOWING my visit to the Faroe Islands last month, I am more convinced than ever that tunnels have a major role to play in addressing our connectivity problems here in Argyll & Bute. But to do that, we as a nation have to change our attitude and embrace the technology that our Nordic cousins regard as a fact of life. I visited the islands as a guest of the Faroese government and the national tunnelling company to see how a group of remote islands could be connected to the centre, by an intricate and hugely impressive network of tunnels. By making this investment, the Faroese government have made it possible for their people to live where they want while still being able to share in the islands' growing prosperity. This visit is just the start of many conversations I plan to have with a view to changing our attitude to tunnels. If they are good enough for the Faroese, I can see no reason why we in the rural west of Scotland shouldn't be able to benefit from them too.





Remembering Lebanon's forgotten refugee crisis



MY NEW YEAR kicked off with a visit to Lebanon to see for myself the ongoing and



seemingly endless refugee crisis in that country and to meet those involved. I was invited to go by the wonderful charity Aid to The Church in Need because of my position as Vice Chair of the All Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief. While there, we met with Lebanese government officials, including the Deputy Prime Minister, the UNHCR, NGOs working with refugee families and the remarkable Archbishop John Issam Darwish from the Diocese of Furzol, Zahle & the Bekaar valley. And of course, we spent most of our time with refugees, both Christian and Muslim listening to their stories. It was a humbling and often harrowing experience which I am due to

feedback to Alistair Burt, the Minister for the Middle East at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office before his trip next month.

DCMS Report brands Facebook "Digital Gangsters"

ON MONDAY, the DCMS Select Committee published the findings of our 18-month long investigation into Fake News & Disinformation. Our report makes for very uncomfortable reading for the Tech Giants, particularly Facebook who are described in the report as "digital gangsters". Our investigation reveals that Facebook knowingly and deliberately broke privacy and competition

laws and routinely harvested users' private data without their knowledge or consent. The wide-ranging report also concluded that democracy is under real threat from the malicious and relentless targeting of people with disinformation and personalised dark propaganda, from unidentifiable sources. It also highlighted the appalling state of the UK's Electoral Law which it describes as being both unfit for purpose and vulnerable to foreign interference.



House of Commons
Digital, Culture, Media and
Sport Committee

Disinformation and 'fake news': Final Report

Eighth Report of Session 2017-19

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**DARK
MONEY**

IN OUR Report, we also accuse the Scottish based Constitutional Research Council and its only known office bearer Richard Cook (a former Scottish Tory Vice Chairman) of “deliberately and knowingly” exploiting a weakness in Electoral law to funnel £435,000 of electoral spending through the Democratic Unionist Party during the EU Referendum.

To this day, the source of the money, the largest political donation in Northern Ireland's history remains a mystery and the DCMS Select Committee has added its weight to the Electoral Commission's demand that the UK Government change the rules around donations to parties in Northern Ireland to allow much greater transparency.

The ferry company with no ferries



WHEN the history of how the UK finally fell apart is written, I suspect there could be an entire chapter devoted to the Seaborne Freight saga. A company with no ships, is given a £14 million shipping contract from a government who, it emerges hasn't followed EU procurement rules and whose due diligence has been questionable at best. Then having stoutly defended their decision in the face of ferocious criticism, the government is forced to come back to parliament and explain why the deal with Seaborne Freight has collapsed. Little wonder I called on the UK transport Secretary to resign last Monday.

Scottish West Coast Fishing Summit

IN JANUARY I hosted the first “Fishing Summit” that was aimed at the specific needs of the inshore fleet on our West Coast. Organised by CIFA, the Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance, the packed event in Glasgow attracted skippers, owners and processors from across Scotland. Although all political parties were invited, only the SNP bothered to turn up with Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy Fergus Ewing being the star attraction, alongside Michael Russell MSP, Deidre Brock MP, Philippa Whitford MP and myself. It was an incredibly useful event and I think those who came along left satisfied that their concerns had been listened to. I look forward to more of these sessions in the future.



Another bank branch bites the dust

ONCE again we are facing another bank branch closure here in Argyll & Bute. This time - again without any consultation whatsoever - it's the turn of the Santander to close the doors of its Helensburgh branch. Last week my colleague David Linden MP secured an emergency debate at Westminster on the Santander's plans. The debate was hugely oversubscribed but I did manage to raise the issue of the Helensburgh branch and the impact closure would have on our local community, particularly the elderly. At the debate I announced that I would be launching a parliamentary petition to save the branch. So braving the howling wind, Helensburgh SNP members took to the streets and in the space of just two hours, collected almost 400 signatures.



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Dunoon welcomes 30 young Carer 'heroes' for well-deserved break



THE community of Dunoon came together a couple of weeks ago to say a big thank you to a group of 30 young carers from right across Scotland, by giving them an unforgettable luxury weekend break at Hunters Quay Holiday Park. The weekend wouldn't have been possible without Argyll Holidays, Communicare, Argyll Ferries, The River Jade Chinese Restaurant and a host of

individuals who went out of their way to make the trip such a success. I was fortunate enough to meet some of these inspirational young folk when, along with Cllr. Audrey Forrest we popped in to say welcome and to deliver a load of chocolate (Cadbury's Heroes...get it?). They were having a great time and I hope they are able to come back again soon.



Catalonia



ON THE day twelve Catalan politicians and civic leaders went on trial in Madrid for seeking to hold a referendum on independence, I was proud to stand in solidarity with them, along with many of my SNP colleagues. It is hard to believe that in Spain, in 2019, people can face 25 years in jail for organising a democratic referendum.



ACHA brings Passivhaus to Argyll & Bute

IT WAS huge privilege to be asked by ACHA to cut the first turf on their new 10-unit housing development in Garelochhead. It was particularly exciting given that the homes are to be built to Passivhaus standard, the first social housing in Argyll & Bute to build to such a high energy efficient-standard.

Congratulations to ACHA, the Scottish Government, Argyll & Bute Council and to the builders, Stewart & Shields from Helensburgh.



Oban Concern for Palestine

I WAS delighted to accept an invitation to speak to Oban Concern 4 Palestine about my experiences in Palestine. It was great to see so many people brave the awful weather in order to take part in a lively discussion about what we can do together to highlight the plight of the Palestinian people. I would like to thank the group for the invitation and to pay tribute to them for the important work they do.



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Dr Philippa takes Members Day by storm

WE HAD another hugely successful Argyll & Bute SNP Members Day last month at which our special guest speaker, Dr Philippa Whitford MP held over 100 members spellbound for most of the day.



Following the CA meeting and the Liaison Committee, members enjoyed a number of wide ranging discussions about election readiness, the importance of being active in our communities well in advance of the next independence referendum, the impact of Brexit on the health service and the day closed with a harrowing and emotional talk from Philippa about her experience of being a breast cancer surgeon in the West Bank and Gaza for many years.

Thanks again, as always to the wonderful Breege Smyth for chairing the whole day and making for it all run so smoothly.

Members Day Saturday 13th April 2019 @ Inveraray Inn

Our next Members Day will be of an internationalist perspective, as ever chaired by our very own Breege. Speaking on 'Scotland's Place in the World' will be Stephen Gethins MP followed by Professor James Mitchell, School of Social and Political Science, Edinburgh University to say a few words on "*to see ourselves as others see us*". The day will conclude with Fiona Stage giving us an update on our Election Readiness.



**Open to all SNP Members. Get involved.
Be heard. Build a better Scotland.**