

BRENDAN O'HARA MP

Constituency Newsletter January 2018

HAPPY NEW YEAR & BEST WISHES FOR 2018.

SCOTS TORIES' BREXIT BETRAYAL

"SO what comes first, your loyalty to the captain of a sinking ship or loyalty to the rural communities of Scotland?"

That is what I asked of the Scottish Tories at the European Union Withdrawal Bill, Clause 11 debate last month. Even the Tories know Clause 11 is nothing but a blatant power-grab of devolved competences from the Scottish Government to Westminster that would have absolutely devastating consequences for Scottish farmers, particularly the farmers on the West Coast.

Despite my appeals, the 13 Scots Tories were bought off by a vague promise from the UK Government that they would bring forward their own amendments in order to safeguard the devolution settlement. Needless to say the UK Government's promises were never kept and the amendments didn't materialise, leaving the future of Scotland's devolved parliament post-Brexit to be decided by the unelected House of Lords.

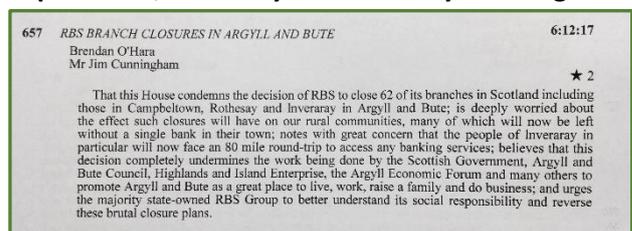
A TRUE WORLD-CLASS DIGITAL NATION

ON THE last day of parliamentary business before the Christmas recess, I was delighted to be able to tell the House of Commons that despite the increasingly hysterical attacks from the Scots Tories and the DCMS, the Scottish Government are well on course to make Scotland a world-class digital nation by 2021. By investing £600 million to provide 30mbps superfast broadband to every home and business, the SNP Scottish Government's ambition outstrips that of any other government in the UK.



PROTECTING ARGYLL & BUTE FROM THE RBS "HATCHET-MEN"

ON WEDNESDAY January 24th, I secured parliamentary time to debate the proposed closure of the, majority state owned Royal Bank of Scotland branches in Campbeltown, Inveraray and Rothesay. Although there



have been a number of debates on the wider issue of branch closures issue, I was absolutely delighted to have time allocated specifically to discuss the closures here in Argyll & Bute and how they will adversely affect, not just the communities involved but the whole of this



constituency. I told the House that these closures will undermine all the good work being done by so many in promoting Argyll & Bute as a great place to live, work, raise a

family and do business. But of course it doesn't have to be this way because the UK Government with a 73% stake in RBS can, if it so wishes intervene to stop these harmful closures. The former Chancellor George Osborne did exactly that when Stephen Hester stepped down as CEO of the bank a few years ago.

as it stands, the UK Government are refusing to accept their responsibility to step in and help, so it's up to us keep the pressure on them. The petitions I launched in



Campbeltown, Inveraray, and Rothesay just before Christmas have been hugely successful and in February I shall present them on the floor of the House of Commons.

TIME TO END THE RURAL RIP-OFF

ONCE again the issue of the disgraceful rip-off of Scottish consumers was highlighted at Westminster. Before the debate I'd asked constituents for their examples, only to be inundated with examples of High Street companies and internet retailers charging extortionate amounts of money to deliver to Argyll & Bute. Thank you to our local SNP councillors, particularly Audrey for helping me to compile a list of examples, some of which I managed to get on the record in the debate.



In one case a delivery company wanted to charge a constituent £90 fee to deliver £18 box of cereal bars to Lochgilhead. Another demanded an extra £300 to deliver a sofa to Dunoon... because Dunoon it seems, is on an ISLAND!! Colleagues from across rural Scotland told similar stories and with the help of the Scottish Government we will continue this fight until this outrage is stopped.

PUPILS TAKE REFUGEE PLEA TO TOWN

I WAS delighted to have been invited to Hermitage Academy in Helensburgh to meet their UNICEF Rights Respecting Group and to help launch their campaign to reunite refugee children with their families. I had no hesitation in offering my support and I urged them not to stop their campaign at the school gate but to talk to their family and friends to change understanding of the issue among people in the town. Hopefully I'll see them at Westminster soon when they deliver their petition to Downing Street.



ALL THE FUN OF THE DUNBEG FAIR

IT HAS become a wee bit of a tradition for me to visit the Dunbeg Primary School Christmas Fair.



Despite the heavy snow, there was, as usual a great turnout as local people rallied to support their school. A great time was had by all and the day was topped off by bumping into Dunbeg's former Head Teacher Sine McVicar, whose immense contribution to the school and the community was recognised when she was awarded an OBE in the New Year's Honours list.

SSPCA's PUPPY FARMING WARNING

THE growth of illegal puppy farming is something that had been increasingly brought to my attention by constituents. To try and better understand the issue I went to meet Kirsteen Campbell, Chief Executive of the SSPCA as well as the staff and volunteers at their centre in Milton, near



Dumbarton. It also gave me an opportunity to meet the dogs, cats, rabbits, birds, snakes and ferrets currently being cared for at the centre in Milton. What I learned from the SSPCA is that illegal puppy farms and puppy smuggling are growing at an alarming rate and it's now a multi-million pound industry, fuelled by greed and with little or no regard for the welfare of the puppies they sell.

I was delighted therefore to help the SSPCA promote their advice that anyone thinking of buying a puppy exercises great caution and find out exactly where your dog has come from and who it is you are buying your dog from.

CAMPBELTOWN'S MASTERPIECE RE-OPENS

WHILE I was in Campbeltown I visited the town's newly-restored Picture House.



And what a job they've done! I was very lucky to

have a personal tour of the building and to be able to see for myself just what a remarkably successful restoration job has been done on The Campbeltown Picture House.

My visit coincided with the making of a documentary about the cinema's restoration and I was only too happy to contribute my initial reaction to what I'd seen.

With two screens, a meeting room, space for exhibitions and displays, a bar and a café, I know this will be a huge asset to the town and I extend my heartiest congratulations to the volunteers and the Board of the Campbeltown Community Business Ltd that, with perseverance and determination, have kept this piece of history alive for future generations to enjoy.

STORM MHAIRI HITS ARGYLL & BUTE

I AM delighted to report that our Argyll & Bute SNP Members Day continues to go from strength to strength, with more than 150 local party members, representing every branch in the constituency descending on Inveraray on Sunday, January 14th to discuss a wide range of issues including, how we build on



our success in Argyll & Bute and how we reach out to and connect with those



marginalised and disillusioned groups within our constituency. In our discussion groups we also challenged ourselves to say how we would create the picture of what a new post-independent Scotland would look like and how we would then sell that vision to the people of Argyll and Bute. The final discussion topic was a challenge to everyone to come up with innovative and creative ways to get our huge membership enthused and energised.



FOR MANY the highlight of the day was an inspiring and electrifying speech by Mhairi Black MP who, having spent the



day flitting between the various breakout groups, told the packed hall that she hadn't experienced such enthusiasm and energy at a meeting since the heady days of the 2014 referendum campaign. Mhairi told the members; "Not since the referendum have I seen so many people packed into public place, not just to listen to someone else but to actively engage

by bringing their own thoughts, opinions and ideas to the debate." And in seeking to recapture the spirit of 2014 Mhairi reiterated that our members were the key to



securing independence and that we had to get back to the days of grassroots activism and local people leading and organising themselves and not waiting to be told what to do and when to do it, She added: "The Members Day here in Argyll & Bute has been a huge success and I'd love to see this type of meeting, where local activists are empowered to take the lead themselves, spread right across Scotland.

OUR NEXT MEMBERS DAY WILL BE ON SUNDAY APRIL 22ND IN INVERARAY