

SCOTTISH SUNDAY EXPRESS OPINION

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Let's all have a say on the future of our great union

GREAT Britain is the most successful union of countries there has ever been. Together, England, Wales and Scotland built an empire, forged the Industrial Revolution and created a stable democracy. Now, with Northern Ireland, it remains a place of untold advantage, tolerance and opportunity. It would be nothing short of tragic were this to end.

Yet end it surely will if we decide to leave the Union in September. Of course, the referendum is entirely a matter for us here in Scotland, and politicians from all sides at Westminster have agreed as such.

However, the future of the United Kingdom is something that concerns every single person who lives in it, from the Highlands to the Home Counties.

As we reveal today, 58 per cent think the English, Welsh and Northern Irish should also have a say in what happens – and 62 per cent want the Union to stay.

If there is a Yes vote then – as Alistair Darling warns today – there will be no going back; Scotland will become an independent country, no matter what.

Yet it is ludicrous to suggest that the terms of our divorce can be decided by one side only. Voters in the rest of the UK will demand that their voices are heard, and quite rightly so.

The Scottish Sunday Express passionately believes that the UK should remain intact with all of us gaining immeasurably from our centuries-long bond.

David Bowie might have been mocked for his appeal last week for Scotland to stay with the Union, but his sentiments are entirely right.

Stay strong on Falklands

MORE sabre rattling from Argentina. Just months before drilling for oil begins in the Falklands, President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner has announced a £3billion revamp of the armed forces, sending out a clear message that that particular row still has some way to run.

She is again trying to distract attention from the dire state of her country's economy, but Britain must make it clear that the Falklands will remain British.

Military chiefs who have been keeping a careful eye on developments must be prepared to do a great deal more than that, including making sure that our Armed Forces are ready to intervene.

The Falklands are British. The overwhelming majority of islanders wish that to remain the case and there must be no wobbling in government.

The Falklands War in 1982 was Margaret Thatcher's finest hour and proof that Britain will not be bullied by anyone. David Cameron must be prepared to show the same mettle should the need arise.

Back to school for new CfEs

AS SCOTTISH education was once viewed as the very best start in the world that a youngster could possibly have. The new Curriculum for Excellence was supposed to re-affirm this proud reputation, and yet from the very start it has been beset by problems.

Tied down by acres of red tape, CfE does little to inspire confidence.

Now it has emerged that teachers, parents and students are deeply unhappy ahead of the first round of CfE exams this summer. With 16 and 17-year-olds set to vote in the referendum, their concerns could turn out to be the SNP's worst nightmare.

Wowed by Winter Games

WHAT A Winter Olympics. Team GB has won four medals to date, our most successful showing since 1924, and now golden girl Lizzy Yarnold will carry the Union Flag at tonight's closing ceremony.

We are proud of her and her fellow British contestants and wish luck to our bobsleigh team today. Whatever the outcome they have made the nation's spirits soar.

Hidden reasons for inquiry delay



By Robert Forrester
SECRETARY OF THE JUSTICE FOR MEGRAHI CAMPAIGN

THE Holyrood Justice Committee's consideration of the Justice for Megrahi (JFM) petition, calling for an independent inquiry into the Lockerbie/Zeist affair, held on Tuesday, was by far the most animated session yet on the subject.

Reaching almost operatic proportions, it generated valiant, bravura performances from both Christine Grahame MSP (the committee's SNP convener) and John Finnie MSP (Independent) in the teeth of determined pressure to close the petition.

This opposition emanated largely from Margaret Mitchell MSP (Conservative).

The principle argument used against keeping the JFM petition open was the feeling that the Justice Committee is wandering away from its strict remit by conflating it with JFM's allegations of criminality against police officers, forensic investigators and legal officials.

Margaret Mitchell's position is an interesting development in that the principal Conservative Party member on the Justice Committee when JFM received its first unanimous vote by the committee to keep the petition open in December 2012 was the late David McLetchie MSP.

JFM had, up until that moment, rather regarded Mr McLetchie as an arch foe. However, he was most vocal in his support of the petition – backing up earlier statements made by John Finnie.

The catalyst behind his change of heart was the fact that he had been attracted by the new dynamic brought to the petition not only by the lodging with the then Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary of the JFM allegations themselves, but also by the manner in which the JFM allegations were being treated by the authorities.

This referred to the Justice Directorate's release of our private and confidential letter to Cabinet Secretary for Justice Kenny MacAskill to the Crown Office and the ensuing media attacks on JFM launched by Chambers Street, culminating in Lord Advocate Frank Mulholland's outbursts on the anniversary of the tragedy in 2012.

It is now, therefore, most curious that the Conservative Party appears to be doing a complete volte-face on essentially the same principle that encouraged Mr McLetchie to support our petition.

IN THE current situation, both JFM and the Justice Committee are being confronted by an outrageously dismissive attitude by Police Scotland and the Crown Office with respect to the JFM allegations. As Mr McLetchie recognised at the time, the petition and the allegations had become inextricably entwined as a result of the attitudes of the authorities to the allegations.

This situation has not altered one jot. In fact, the attitude of Police Scotland and the Crown Office towards JFM is now even more parlous than it ever has been



TRUTH WILL OUT: But there is opposition to an independent Lockerbie inquiry

following the freezing of the investigation into three highly contentious allegations, so why has the position of the Conservative Party changed?

Something of a mystery. Or, perhaps Margaret Mitchell's viewpoint is simply her own and not necessarily her party's. Perhaps she sees herself as a champion of the Crown Office and Police Scotland where Mr McLetchie wisely spied a political opportunity in supporting the JFM's mutually complementary petition and allegations. Perhaps he saw JFM as an irritant to First Minister Alex Salmond and his longstanding Justice Secretary. They can hardly be overjoyed today by

'The attitude of Police Scotland and the Crown Office is more parlous than it ever has been'

the fact that our petition has now entered its fourth year on the parliamentary books – still buoyed by the opinion poll in this newspaper in September 2011, which found that 52 per cent thought there ought to be an independent inquiry into the Lockerbie bombing.

ULTIMATELY, the strength of Christine Grahame's anger at the behaviour of Police Scotland, and John Finnie's presentation of the current, developing environment vis-à-vis JFM's petition and the nine JFM allegations won the day – with the Justice Committee decision that letters would be sent to the Chief Constable of Police Scotland Sir Stephen House and Detective Superintendent Stuart Johnstone asking them, among other things, to account for the seemingly blasé and dismissive conduct of Police Scotland.

It now remains to be seen whether or not Margaret Mitchell will, before her next consideration of this petition, experience the same political epiphany that David McLetchie did.



Chance to inspire and be inspired

By Shona Robison
COMMONWEALTH GAMES AND SPORT MINISTER

IN 150 days' time, a spectacular opening ceremony will declare to the world that Scotland is ready to host the greatest ever Commonwealth Games. With 70 countries taking part in 11 days of world-class sport, and an associated culture programme running all year, it is the largest sporting and cultural event Scotland has ever hosted.

In seven months the Ryder Cup, the greatest golf tournament in the world, comes to Gleneagles. And with Scots on Team GB medalling at Sochi and Andy Murray set to defend his Wimbledon crown, 2014 is shaping up to be the most exciting year ever for Scottish sport.

At Glasgow 2014, Team Scotland will field its largest ever team with a target to win more medals than ever before. We start from a good base, with sportscotland's record investment of £38million between 2011-15 into the 17 Commonwealth sports and para sports giving confidence that we will have the best prepared, most organised Team Scotland

us an exceptional opportunity to make Scotland healthier, help our businesses to prosper and celebrate our vibrant culture at home and on the world stage.

Over the past year, I have seen the unfolding sporting, cultural and business benefits of hosting these events:

- New and upgraded world-class facilities to inspire more young people to get active and for those already involved in sport, to get to the next level.
- Economic benefits, with around 30,000 jobs supported as a result of Glasgow 2014 procurement contracts.
- Scotland strengthening its relationship with the Commonwealth through education and culture.
- £1billion worth of transport infrastructure which is helping to open up Glasgow and West Central Scotland to further economic opportunities.

For me and my colleagues in Government, the Games has to deliver long-lasting benefits years after they have finished. This 12 months of sport offers

more active and prosperous Scotland. So this week, we are marking Legacy Week, a chance to celebrate these people and these projects, to highlight the world of possibilities to get involved in the Games, and to give people the chance to build their own legacy.

There is something for everyone in Scotland's year of sport and we can all help Scotland shine even brighter this year.

SCOTLAND'S SPORTING GREATS: PULL-OUT

'2014 is shaping up to be the most exciting year for Scottish sport'

CROSS BENCHER

Debate tinged by purple haze

PETE 'The Man Who Fell to Perth' Wishart was at the BRIT Awards on Wednesday night to hear David Bowie's appeal (delivered via supermodel Kate Moss) to "stay with us Scotland".

The SNP MP plays in MP4, Westminster's very own rock band, and he posted a photo on Twitter showing him and his fellow political rockers Ian Cawsey and Greg Knight posing with a waxwork model of Jimi Hendrix.

"At the BRITs with our new guitarist," he chuckled. Wonder what Hendrix would have made of the independence debate?



THE Thin White Duke's pro-Union stance prompted a disgracefully over-the-top reaction from the legions of swivel-eyed Cybernats who pollute the Internet.

Bowie is as English as they come, raised in the drab suburbs of Bromley, south London, by parents John and Peggy Jones (although his mother's maiden name was Burns, she is of Irish descent), which means that some insist he cannot therefore have an opinion on Scottish independence.

In that case, what about schools minister and rabid Nationalist Mike Russell – who is also a Bromley boy?

DAVID Bowie's lyrics featured twice in the opening exchanges of First Minister Questions, with Eck Salmond congratulating Eve Muirhead's curling rink and chuckling: "This shows we can all be heroes, just for one day."

In response, We Johann Lamont urged the FM to "turn and face the strange" – although it is doubtful whether George Osborne, Ed Balls, Jose Manuel Barroso et al would be delighted with this description.

TIRED of the referendum debate? Well blame Sean Clerkin. If the lefty protestors' heckles had not prompted hapless Iain Gray to hide in a sandwich shop then Alex Salmond would never have won a landslide in the 2011 Holyrood elections and with it a "mandate" to pursue his dream of breaking up Britain.

Clerkin has now lodged a petition at the Parly, calling for the Commonwealth Games to drop benefits agency ATOS as a sponsor because of its role in the benefits reforms – which has attracted ZERO signatures or comments.

SANDRA White, along with fellow MSPs Jean Urquhart, John Finnie, David Torrance, Rob Gibson, Adam Ingram, Richard Lyle and Mike MacKenzie, congratulated University of Glasgow students on electing whistleblower Edward Snowden as rector.

Perhaps they will think differently next time there is a terrorist attack somewhere in the world which could have been prevented had Snowden not exposed the secret surveillance techniques which kept us all safe?