

THE SMEAR CAMPAIGN CONTINUES. The latest of the SNP MP's to be targeted for alleged impropriety appears to be Patricia Gibson, who represents North Ayrshire & Arran.

The Daily Record, fresh from its convenient amnesia over the £10,000 pounds missing from Kezia Dugdale's constituency funds, which incidentally is under investigation by the Police after local activists blew the whistle because Party headquarters failed to respond to local concerns, are clearly in need of a more convenient target. A target which matches their political mantra - 'all SNP bad.'

Their article on 11.12.15 by Ross Dunn accuses Patricia Gibson MP of claiming £35,349.85 back on her expenses between May and July this year, which they enthusiastically describe as a "spending spree" and "the highest expenses claim in Scotland." Yet their own article explains why?

Of the total sum claimed back, **£17,160 went on accommodation/rent** and £9,500 on office rent. Totalling £26,660 of the £35,349.85 claimed. This seems high, but as Ms Gibson told the Irvine Herald: *"The reason my accommodation and office expenses are so high is because I paid the yearly rent in advance in order to negotiate a reduced price. Therefore, these annual costs have distorted the quarterly figure, since the rental costs will be zero for the rest of the year."* Actions of someone on the make or someone conscious of the burden on the taxpayer?

Then the Daily Record attacks her on her expenses, but once again their own article debunks their own criticisms? They highlight how she claimed for two BA business/club class flights from Glasgow to London at £430.50 each. But as Ms Gibson explains, *"All MPs travel on the same basis. The flights are booked by the parliamentary travel office as one cannot always be sure when one can return home due to frequent alterations to the business of the parliament and flights often have to be changed at short notice. If one does not have a flexible flight and cannot make that flight, the ticket is non-refundable."* In other words, because the Parliament finishes various times in the evening, unless she has this type of ticket, she loses her flight home and the taxpayer pays for a trip that didn't happen.

Finally they highlighted how she claimed for a train ride from Glengarnock to Kilwinning totalling a grand sum of, wait for it, £3.20. Would the Daily Record prefer if she claimed for a limousine?

In summary, this is clearly just the latest in smears directed at the SNP, such is the desperation to discredit them and their cause, and to make the public think that MP's are all as bad as each other. Whilst entirely unsurprising, it is a shame that looking at matters in a balanced context has long since gone from the majority of the press, as they have their crucial role to play in preserving the union and attacking those that are at the frontline of the case for independence. This is why stories like that of the Kezia Dugdale constituency funds have been forgotten; or little was made of Labour MP's who were alleged to have been implicated in the Westminster expenses scandal (Mark 2). Jim Murphy was one of those implicated, but that's a whole other story involving home flipping. Alas, the paperwork for all those implicated were lost by parliamentary authorities. Oh dear never mind. Convenient?

There will be many more of these types of stories to come over the coming months, which I believe will be unfounded, although some will take longer to debunk than others, such as in the cases of Michelle Thomson and Natalie McGarry. These stories are designed to throw mud in the hope that some of it sticks. Unfortunately some people fall for it, which is why they do it.

Raibeart MacPhàrlain

In the past few weeks we have seen the priorities of this Union laid bare for all to see. Well would see if the media actually reported on the absurdity of what is going on. The Autumn Statement, shows the priorities of the UK government is wealth redistribution, from the poor to the rich and from Scotland, Wales to London .

The Scottish budget cut again, a 5% cut over 5 years, (5.7% in real terms over 5 years). The Capital Budget has been increased, which is welcome, but this will not help the day to day running of Scotland. The 5.7% (real term) cut affects the things we rely on, Police, NHS and Council Services to name a few.

While Scotland's had our budget slashed, some sectors have done very well, the Royal family being one. They've been handed a 7% increase, from £40.1m to £42.9m. The only family on benefits acceptable to the Tories. The fact this was buried on page 120 of the Autumn Statement says it all, they don't want the masses to know, move along peasants, nothing to see here. Another cut hidden by Osborne, a stab in the back to Scotland is the withdrawal of funding for Carbon Capture and Storage Commercialisation Competition (CCSC), this is nothing more than environmental and economic vandalism, we had the opportunity to become a world leader in carbon capture at Peterhead. The sudden announcement, with no prior discussion, with the Scottish Government shows massive disrespect to Scotland.

Shell have spent a large sum of money developing this. I don't have a huge deal of sympathy with Shell, after their open support of the Union throughout the Indyref but, Shell are a major player and employer in North Sea. The UK Government's actions put further investment by Shell at risk. After the announcement Shell said *"without that funding, we no longer see a future for the Peterhead project in the near term"*.



The long term existence of Peterhead power plant is now under question. With the current problems in the local economy the power plant could have given the North East a much needed boost. Shell estimated between 400-600 people would be employed in the construction phase, with 20-30 permanent jobs thereafter. These jobs, would be the tip of the iceberg, as the expertise gained in this project could be exported worldwide in the same way the (world leader) North East subsea sector does now.

Unfortunately at this time we do not know where the £1b saving cancelling this competition will be spent. If it's not spent in Scotland, it will mean that not 1p of the Strategic Infrastructure Projects fund, will be spent in Scotland .

Scotland should be the electricity power house of the UK, wind, solar, wave, hydro and carbon capture, but our natural advantages are being ignored at best, but more like attacked. Oh and I all most forgot it looks like another war with no clear objectives .

This article was held back from last issue because of the vote to illegally bomb Syria - by **Alan Pettie**

The Forth Road Bridge FAQ - by Rev. Stuart Campbell - Over the last few days, as most of **Scotland's media has focused on hysterical smear stories and outright lies**, we've been digging around trying to uncover the truth about events around and leading to the closure of the Forth Road Bridge.



Here's what we've got so far .

1. The reason there isn't already a second road bridge at Queensferry is the Labour Party. When they came to power at Westminster in 1997 **one of their first acts was to cancel the building** of a new bridge planned by the previous Conservative government, claiming that building it would cause traffic congestion in Edinburgh.

2. When the Scottish Parliament was restored in 1999 and Labour ran it for eight years, they continued to stall and delay and oppose the building of a second bridge, **despite the increasingly urgent warnings** of the Forth Estuary Transport Authority (FETA) that one was needed as soon as possible due to traffic load on the old bridge

3. Prominent Labour figures, meanwhile, were still insisting that **there was no need for a new bridge** as the old one could survive indefinitely, and concentrating all their attention to **building the Edinburgh trams instead**, reacting with fury to any suggestion that the bridge was a greater priority.

4. When **the SNP** came to power at Holyrood in 2007, within months they'd analysed a study and **announced that a new bridge would be built.**

5. Labour, **still in power at Westminster**, continued to **obstruct and delay the bridge** as much as possible, refusing the Scottish Government permission to use advance capital funding to get the crossing built quickly and suggesting that they instead save up for several years, or use crippling expensive PFI to finance it. (Even though PFI was the reason they'd given for cancelling the Tory one in 1997.)

6. Meanwhile, the old bridge was still **suffering under the strain** of far more and much **heavier traffic than it was designed for** in 1964. However, strengthening work over the years had enabled it to adapt to the higher load as a temporary coping measure while the new bridge was built to relieve it.

very significant extent such that replacement/refurbishment is needed imminently. Short term repairs have allowed FETA to prolong the joints' lives until the opening of the adjacent Forth Replacement Crossing allows traffic to be diverted and a major repair to be undertaken. At present, the options for repair require the use of a substantial temporary bridge structure over the joint.

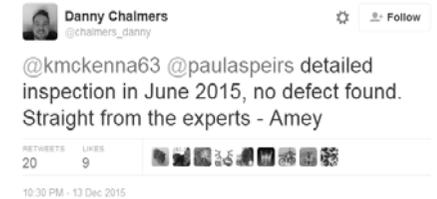
7. This was part of a conscious general **strategy to minimise disruption** to bridge users until the new crossing was operational, at which point major repairs to the old bridge could be undertaken. In 2012 Forth bridgemaster Barry Colford told an International Association for Bridge Maintenance and Safety conference at Lake Como in Italy:

8. In 2012 the Scottish Government **decided** that in the light of budget pressures it would dissolve FETA within three years and hand responsibility for the bridge over to Transport Scotland. **It advanced the Authority money** from future budgets so that it could **fund maintenance work** from its reserves until its dissolution.

9. In 2009 FETA had decided to defer some repair and strengthening work which had been planned for 2010, in order to manage its budget effectively and also prioritise the most important safety issues, which at the time still mainly concerned **corrosion of the bridge's main suspension cables.**

10. In 2015 Barry Colford imposed a 150-tonne weight restriction for abnormal loads as a preventative measure to reduce unnecessary strain until the section was repaired or replaced. Such a restriction would have almost no effect on bridge users, loads of such a size being extremely rare.

11. Part of the section which was originally scheduled to be replaced as part of those repairs developed a crack in December 2015, leading to the bridge being closed as a precaution to avoid greater damage. The defective part had not previously been thought to be at risk and the problem had not been foreseen.



Bridge operator Amey discovered the failure during routine inspection. An Amey spokesman said that the failed member had never been identified as undergoing abnormal loading, although it was in a location where some neighbouring members of the truss were under high stress.

In summary, then, what we know is this: **that for almost 20 years Labour have first cancelled, then obstructed and delayed, a second bridge** that would otherwise have been operating now. Had that bridge been in place major repairs could have been done to the old bridge, rather than having to be delayed in the hope of minimising disruption.

Had FETA felt that these major repairs were urgently required, **it had the money in its reserves to carry them out.** It chose instead, quite reasonably, to try to stall and buy some time until the new bridge was due to open next year, thereby avoiding the total closure that the repairs would have entailed.

The **sudden unforeseen failure of a part which had been regularly inspected and not found to be under any detectable stress** then forced a precautionary closure of the bridge. There was at no point any risk of the bridge collapsing. Had the defective part failed entirely, it would have caused damage that would have taken far longer to repair, but the bridge would not have fallen into the Forth.

FETA took a calculated risk which was in effect a “no-lose” gamble. They hoped **a bridge closure could be avoided**, but since their only other to replace a whole section – which option would **DEFINITELY close the bridge, and for longer** – current events leave bridge users no worse off than they would have been had the work been done.

Q – Is the bridge fit for purpose?
A – Yes, it is not at risk of collapsing. This defect may cause a “local” failure in a section of the structure. However, the bridge is getting older, is now over 51 years old, and is carrying twice the weight and twice volume of traffic it was originally designed for. Fatigue and/or overstress failures in welds and welded joints and plates such as this are a product of time and load fluctuations as well as load intensity can occur in bridges of this type.

And that's the story. On taking power the **SNP commissioned a second bridge as fast as possible**, and FETA (**a body dominated by councillors from Unionist parties**) acted sensibly and responsibly in trying to keep traffic running by patching up the old bridge until the new one could relieve the burden and enable major work to be done.

The only people who can definitively **be identified as being at fault are the Labour Party**, without whom there would already be two road bridges across the Forth at Queensferry. Readers may feel that it's little wonder that they're making so much noise now, in a **frantic attempt to distract attention from their own culpability.**