



Stewart Maxwell MSP

Scottish National Party

Representing you in the West of Scotland

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Maxwell Demands Fairness for Scottish Troops Serving in Iraq

Stewart Maxwell MSP has urged Parliament to support a Motion commending Glasgow City Council on their decision to award Council Tax discounts of up to 50% to troops whilst they are on active service in Iraq. In addition, Mr. Maxwell has called on all other local authorities to follow the example established by Glasgow City Council and accord Scottish soldiers their due.

Glasgow City Councils interpretation of policy allows Scottish soldiers to apply for exemption from paying full Council Tax whilst they are in Iraq. These exemptions are the equivalent of which a convicted criminal receives while in prison. The fact that other local councils give this 'disregard' on council tax to convicted criminals, as they must under existing legislation, yet refuse to use the same interpretation of the legislation as Glasgow to exempt or 'disregard' troops serving abroad in places such as Iraq clearly shows an outrageous anomaly within this legislation which the Executive must take steps to rectify. This is an insult to those men and women serving in Iraq who deserve our support at such a difficult time as this.

Explaining the back-

ground to the motion Mr Maxwell said

"I was contacted by a constituent whose son is a member of the TA and serving in Iraq. While he is fighting in a war of this Government's making, he is being forced to pay Council Tax for premises that he is obviously unable to live in, whilst comrades of his serving alongside him are being given council tax rebate by Glasgow City Council.

When I contacted his local Council and other Councils I was informed that they had no leeway to award discretionary discounts. However, when I contacted Glasgow City Council they informed me that, although serving TA personnel have no automatic right to a discount, the council did indeed now have a policy, based on fairness, that troops being sent to fight for their country should not be asked to pay for services they could not possibly receive, and therefore a discount would be granted. This effectively means that a soldier staying on his own within Glasgow would receive a 50% discount whilst serving in Iraq. However if you stay in another Council area you will receive no discount as they have decided to hide behind the strict legal position

and refuse to pay this relief under any circumstances."

In addition to tabling the Motion in the Scottish Parliament, Mr. Maxwell has written to all local councils throughout Scotland, exhorting them to follow the lead of Glasgow City Council and award Council Tax discounts to troops whilst on the active service in Iraq. Mr. Maxwell elaborated,

"I applaud the decision taken by Glasgow City Council to award these discounts to troops serving in Iraq. Now that Glasgow has done so, there is no excuse for any other Council not to support the troops by implementing this measure. Therefore, I have now written to all Councils urging them to follow Glasgow's example and award Council Tax discounts to all troops serving in Iraq. Now is the time for all other Councils throughout the length and breadth of Scotland to get behind Scottish troops. I urge local authorities in Scotland to come out from behind the legalities, and support Scottish troops by granting Council Tax relief for TA personnel serving in Iraq. Scottish troops deserve no less"



Maxwell Forces Executive To Publish Health Data

In an important move for Scottish health, Shadow Deputy Minister for Health Stewart Maxwell MSP has forced the Executive to publish Scottish statistics for the indicators contained in the WHO European 'Health for All' database. Prior to this there was no specific data of this type available for Scotland. This move represents an important step in quantifying the state of the health and well-being of the Scottish people, so that work may continue to tackle Scotland's reputation as 'the sick man of Europe.'

Mr Maxwell applauded the progress made, saying,

"The UK has an entry in the 'Health for All' database, but Scotland has no separate listing. Indeed a report commissioned by the Public Health Institute of Scotland in February 2003 titled 'Understanding the Health of Scotland's population in an International Context' stated that, 'a real frustration is the fact that the very useful and accessible Health For All database from WHO Copenhagen does not include Scotland.' In September, I asked a series of written questions to establish Scottish figures for the information in the 'Health for All' database. As a result of my questions the Executive have agreed to commission work to put this information into the public domain. I am encouraged that the Executive have agreed with me that it is vital that since health is devolved we have devolved statistics, which allow us to compare ourselves with the other countries in Europe and so help formulate effective Health measures. This will be enormously valuable to everyone who has an interest in public health in Scotland."

To address seriously Scotland's unique health challenges, it is essential that authoritative data be published that specifies health issues in Scotland as distinct from the United Kingdom. The Executive's eventual acceptance of Mr Maxwell's demand for separate health statistics in the WHO database signifies a significant step forward for the people of Scotland, their health, and their welfare.

Maxwell Condemns Abolition of Health Improvement Fund

Shadow Deputy Health Minister Mr Stewart Maxwell MSP condemned the recent move by the Scottish Executive to abolish the Health Improvement Fund (HIF). In answer to a Parliamentary Question tabled by Mr. Maxwell, the Executive were forced to concede that "a separate [HIF] fund no longer exists."

Mr Maxwell criticised this decision, saying, "I am appalled that the Executive has abolished the Health Improvement Fund, particularly as it is mentioned in the Executive's 'Annual Evaluation Report 2005-06' as a vehicle for promoting equality. The Health Im-

provement Fund was created by ring-fencing Scotland's share of tobacco tax and using it specifically for health improvement projects in conjunction with partner agencies. The Executive have stated that some of the HIF fund money is being incorporated into NHS Board main allocations. I would be very disappointed to discover, that this money, which was originally earmarked for health improvement was being used for a more general purpose, such as to fund wage bills for example."

The abolition of the Health Improvement Fund appears to directly contradict the Executive's

assertion that "the HIF is beginning to make an important contribution across a range of public health priorities," and its cessation belies the Executive's pledge that "the level of activity [of the HIF] will increase as planning gives way to implementation in a number of areas, and in due course this will feed through in later years to a healthier Scotland." The loss of the Health Improvement Fund will have severe consequences for the people of Scotland. This measure contradicts the Executive's self-avowed health campaign and will do nothing to improve Scotland's position as the 'Sick man of Europe'.



Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Peaceful New Year.

Happy Chanukah