

Menace of drug-driving on our roads must be tackled

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THERE have rightly been huge efforts in recent years to crack down on the scourge of drink-driving on our roads. In 2014, the Scottish Government was praised when it became the first country in the UK to further lower the legal alcohol limit for motorists.

However, as alarming research revealed by the Sunday Herald shows today, there is another menace on the road of Scotland which is not being tackled by the government – drug-driving. Figures show that the number of drivers and motorcyclists who died with cannabis in their system over three years was exactly the same number as those who died after drinking. While it cannot be concluded that every accident was a result of taking drugs, it shows the shocking scale and impact of drug-driving on Scotland's roads.

In 2013, the UK Government and the Scottish Government undertook a joint public consultation on proposals for new regulations on drug-driving.

After the consultation, drug-driving limits and improved testing were introduced in England and Wales. However, the Holyrood government did nothing despite having the power to decide if a new drug-driving offence should be introduced and, if so, what the limits for specified drugs should be. The lack of action is quite simply baffling when the human death toll is considered.

Taking a few simple legislative steps in Holyrood would end the current “loophole” in Scotland. If the Scottish Government wants to improve road safety in Scotland – and thereby save lives – it now has to be as tough on drug-driving as drink-driving.

SNP must be radical on tax

THE SNP's stunning UK General Election result in 2015 was partly secured after a campaign opposing Tory austerity.

Nicola Sturgeon pointed out that the reckless choices of the Conservatives were bad for public services.

However, Holyrood is no longer a bystander in the tax debate. Sweeping new powers, particularly over income tax, give MSPs the option of reversing spending cuts.

If the political will existed, Holyrood could raise the basic rate of income tax by 1p and increase the top rate from 45p to 50p.

Sadly, the Scottish Government is refusing to travel down this road. On tax, last week's Budget was nothing more than an inconsequential tweak of the current system.

Income tax rates for the rich and middle classes remain unaltered and

local government had to swallow a cut, albeit a smaller dose of pain than was previously expected.

As we reveal today, the government's own adviser on poverty, Naomi Eisenstadt, has backed increased taxes for people earning over £100,000. We applaud her call.

If the government is committed to reducing poverty and inequality, tax has to be in the foreground of decision-making. In particular, the tax rates of the rich must be increased.

This is not to say that a perfect society can be built on the backs of the 17,000 people who pay the “additional” 45p rate, but the government must acknowledge that some of the cuts to public services can be avoided. We need transformative changes to reap tangible benefits on education and child poverty, not tweaks to an unsatisfactory status quo.

A poodle cannot be a watchdog

SINCE 2017 dawned the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (Sepa) has not exactly covered itself in glory.

It has proposed scrapping limits on salmon farmed in cages around the coast. It has admitted asking industrial polluters to help hire senior pollution regulators and top government officials to help choose senior Sepa managers. And as we report today, it has been caught secretly considering plans for the world's biggest salmon farm, which would create more sewage waste than Glasgow.

Sepa, let us not forget, is meant to protect us from pollution. But it almost seems more concerned to

grease the wheels of industry. This is disturbing. As one former Sepa official told us, there's a tricky balance between being close enough to industry to understand it, and getting too close.

Sepa is in the midst of a major overhaul of its regulatory arrangements, and it is under budgetary pressure.

Its managers need to ensure that it effectively monitors and reports pollution, and forcefully reprimands offenders. It must be a lively and sharp-toothed watchdog, not a sleepy and soft-hearted poodle.

Scottish ministers, too, should ensure that their regulatory agency doesn't grow flabby and weak.

Faces of the week



Costa-award-winning novelist **Sebastian Barry** paid tribute to his son, Toby, who came out as gay aged 16. Barry's book *Days Without End* was partly inspired by a gang threatening Toby after seeing him kiss his boyfriend on a train. “I wanted to beat them to death with a large stick,” said Barry, “and this informed the book because I felt such a terrible sense of emergency.”



Scientists have identified the earliest known ancestor of humans – and it's not pretty. “Exquisitely well preserved” fossilised traces of the millimetre-long **Saccorhytus** – thought to have lived between grains of sand on the seabed about 540 million years ago – have been discovered in central China. It appears to have a kind of mouth but no anus.



Johnny Depp spends on average £1.6 million a month, including £23,800 on wine. According to his former managers (who he accuses of mismanaging his earnings) the Pirates Of The Caribbean actor spent £14.3m on a luxury yacht and £2.4m blasting the ashes of his friend and author Hunter S Thompson into space with a canon.

Levelling the educational



PM is the one playing to gallery

KEITH Howell attacks Alex Salmond for pointing out the undemocratic nature of Theresa May's Brexit statements whereby a Remain-voting Scotland is ignored and told our opinion does not matter (Salmond plays to the balcony on Brexit, Letters, January 29). He accuses Salmond of hearing in May's speeches only what he wants to hear and interpreting it to suit his views.

Touche: Howell indulges in this ploy when describing Salmond's response to the PM's statement as an “outburst” rather than the valid response of the spokesman of a major political party. He resorts – as do many with a weak argument – to personal abuse, likening Salmond to a political pantomime dame “playing to the gallery”. Isn't this what May has done since her accidental elevation to PM?

James Mills, Johnstone

ONLY someone desperate to ignore reality himself could suggest that Prime Minister Theresa May and her Tory government have demonstrated any willingness to seriously consider the First Minister's proposals contained in Scotland's Place In Europe, never mind made any movement to reach a genuine compromise to mitigate the potentially calamitous effects of Brexit on Scotland's economy.

The painful “reality” for others, should Keith Howell achieve his apparent wish of indefinitely prolonging our long outdated “Union”, is that instead of regaining self-respect through self-determination, Scotland would be condemned to perhaps decades of increasingly right-wing Tory rule, in turn fostering an increasingly selfish, greedy and insular “society” more reflective of Donald Trump's dream world than the socially responsible country envisioned by most Scottish citizens who have not forsaken hope of a better future for their children.

Stan Grodynski, Longniddry