



Mark Lazarowicz, MP for Edinburgh N & Leith
Parliamentary and constituency report

*With season's greetings for Christmas
and the New Year!*



THE ECONOMY

Over the last two months the state of the economy has dominated business at Westminster. I know from people who come to see me at my surgeries that the economic situation and cuts in public spending are beginning to worry more and more people in Edinburgh.

The UK Government's decision to raise VAT to 20% at the start of the year, cut public sector jobs and benefits together with the sharp rise in energy bills this winter have put household budgets under real strain. As people have inevitably cut spending that in turn has affected small businesses and the retail sector in particular.

I have been focusing especially on the problem of youth unemployment over the past year. The need for action has become even more urgent with the latest statistics showing the number of young people looking for work in Edinburgh North and Leith had risen 18% in the last 12 months. You can read what I said most recently in Parliament on this here: <http://bit.ly/u5h5Y3>

ENERGY BILLS

As far back as the summer I challenged the Prime Minister on what action the Government is taking to help people facing sharp rises in energy prices. As the colder weather sets in the issue is more pressing than ever. You can read what I said here with his response: <http://bit.ly/sOa51Q>

GREEN INVESTMENT BANK

In his autumn statement the Chancellor seemed to depict green policies and business as at odds with each other saying 'we are not going to save our planet by shutting down our steel mills'.

I think that we need to have a broader vision than that so green technology becomes a much more important part of the economy and the innovative green businesses based here in Edinburgh point to the way to the future.

That's why I have been pushing for the Government to get the Green Investment Bank up and running as soon as possible and to base it in Edinburgh. I raised it again in Parliament just at the beginning of the month: <http://bit.ly/sBz7Qf>

NEW WIND TURBINE FACTORY FOR LEITH?

I have been backing the plans that could see Leith becoming the base for a major new wind turbine manufacturing plant. A leading European company, Gamesa, is soon to decide on where to locate a new factory that could create a thousand jobs, and Leith is one of the two possible sites.

I have written to the company's Chief Executive to say just why Leith would be an ideal location as well as to the First Minister, Secretary of State for Scotland and the leader of the City Council, calling on them to work together to bring the development to Leith. This is just the kind of project the Green Investment Bank could support as I stressed to the Business Minister in Parliament: <http://bit.ly/uoCrsp>

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF OUR RAILWAYS

Another area where I believe investment by Government could help to boost the economy is in the future of our rail network. I spoke in a Westminster debate on high speed rail in November and once again called on the UK Government to make a commitment as soon as possible for the line to come to Edinburgh: <http://bit.ly/vzusff>

That's in the interest not just of Scotland but also the North of England. It's argued by some that it would be better to upgrade the existing rail network but I don't believe that it need be either/or: both high speed rail and upgrading current cross-border rail services would boost the economies of cities en route.

DISABILITY ISSUES

In the last 18 months the UK Government has announced big changes to benefits for disabled people which I know from talking to people locally are causing a lot of concern.

These include reassessing the eligibility of people with long-term conditions, axing help with transport for people in residential care and imposing a time limit on one benefit - Employment and Support Allowance [ESA]. I highlighted in Parliament the problems that the design of the form for ESA can present for visually impaired people as you can see here: <http://bit.ly/sZruBh>

Earlier in the year I made a more broad ranging speech on the changes which highlighted how worried people are by the requirement to undergo reassessments where their condition has not changed given the Government's stated aim of reducing the budget for disability benefits by 20%: <http://bit.ly/gnQ68L>

I have also been involved with the issue of disabled people's access to transport as the body advising the Government on this looks set to be abolished. I want to see access improved rather than steps backwards. You can find more on this here: <http://bit.ly/tGqgA6>

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

I know that many people here in Edinburgh have a close interest in developing countries. In the last 12 months the drought in the Horn of Africa has led to famine in Somalia and a flood of refugees into N. Kenya. I have met with leading aid organisations to discuss how to ensure long-term food security in the region and I raised the issue of speculation in food commodities with the Minister: <http://bit.ly/sVEsb9>

This year's World AIDS day had a particular significance as it is now 30 years since the first recorded case. I spoke at 2 memorable events in the course of the last 6 months:

- at Waverley Care which offers care and support to people here in Edinburgh who are HIV positive: <http://bit.ly/pTKrWQ>
- Edinburgh University's Stop AIDS Group: <http://bit.ly/nuZvna>

REMEMBRANCE DAY

On Remembrance Day as always our thoughts turned to those who so bravely sacrificed their lives for our freedom. I was present at moving events at Pilrig and Redbraes as you can read at <http://bit.ly/ux1w6L>

You can contact me *by emailing mark.lazarowicz.mp@parliament.uk or by writing to my office at 5 Croall Place, EH7 4LT Tel.: 0131 557 0577 www.marklazarowicz.org.uk or come along and speak to me at one of my weekly Friday advice surgeries (**no appointment needed**) at 4pm **Stockbridge Library** and 5pm at **my office at 5 Croall Place, Leith Walk***
Follow me on Twitter @marklazarowicz

Please note that there will be no surgeries on 23rd or 30th December

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year