

SCOTTISH DEBT

By **Kenneth McClure**

SCOTTISH politicians clashed today at Holyrood after shock figures revealed that Scotland's debt has increased in the last year

Today's figures show that Scotland's debt is almost £15 billion, 9.7% of Scottish GDP, an increase from the previous financial year. These figures have been released just days before what would have been Independence Day if Scotland had voted 'Yes' in 2014.

First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, was on the defensive as opposition MSPs attacked the viability of the Nationalists' dream of Independence. Labour leader Kezia Dugdale and Conservative leader Ruth Davidson questioned the SNP's figures on oil production, and its benefit to the Scottish economy, as outlined in the famous White Paper.

Outraged, Sturgeon insisted: "The fact of the matter is Ruth Davidson is the leader of a party that has ripped billions out of Scotland."

David Cameron warned that the impact on Scotland's economy could have been potentially devastating, especially with the ever falling oil revenues from the North Sea.

The report from Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland has been used by opposition parties in Scotland to put forward the view that Scotland would be facing a uncertain financial future if we had voted to leave the union.

The PM also attacked the SNP in the House of Commons, saying he "dreaded to think what taxation would have to be levied not just on whisky but on petrol, work, incomes and homes."

However, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon believes that Scotland's economy still has strong foundations and when the figures are read in context, which she stresses they should be, it's clear that Scotland's economy has performed similarly to the UK as a whole.

"Over the past 10 years, the reality is that Scotland's fiscal position has been broadly similar to that of the rest of the UK," said the First Minister.

The figures show Scotland has generated less tax per head than the rest of the UK for the first time in 35 years, with Scotland generating roughly £10,000 in tax per person whereas it spent £12,800 per person.

Many argue this is a result of the falling oil prices, with our North Sea economy sinking. Others point to our onshore economy, with our international exports, excluding oil and gas, growing 17.3%, from 2010 to 2014. Scotland's productivity has also increased 4.4% since 2007, whereas the UK's as a whole has fallen 0.2%.