A charaid chòir,

Bu toil leam an cothrom ghabhail a chur mo bheachdan air adhart a thaobh Bile an Reifreinn mar fianais chun a’ Chomataidh. Bidh mi sin a dhèanamh anns a’ Bheurla air sgàth gu bheil mi a’ tuigsinn nach eil Gàidhlig aig a h-uile duine air a’ chomataidh seo, agus air sgàth gu bheil mi fhathast nam oileanach aig a bheil Beurla. Co-dhiù, tha e feumail a ràdh cuideachd gu bheil e fhathast cudromach dhomh gu bheil roghainn agam Gàidhlig a chleachadh. Mar oileanach, ag ionnsachadh Gàidhlig, tha e cudromach dhomh, gun teagamh, gu bheil mi a’ faicinn cleachadh na Gàidhlig aig gach ire ann am beatha poileataigeach na h-Alba.

I believe that Gàidhlig should be used on the ballot paper, and that our official languages be evident at polling booths, for the Referendum on the 18th September 2014.

In areas where councils, such as South Lanarkshire Council, are stuck in their ways and are struggling to implement legislation because of old values and a lack of foresight, I believe the introduction of Gàidhlig in the 2014 Referendum could help the overall objective of the National Language Plan in creating a conscientious awareness of our languages that are rooted in our sovereign nation’s heritage, culture and DNA.

Moreover, by showing such leadership, and ensuring Gaelic is evident at polling booths and on the ballot papers, the Scottish Government would be creating important awareness of our rich native language. Not to grasp this opportunity would, I believe, be akin to imitating language policy of the British Empire – Scotland, thank goodness, has moved on from such a draconian measure, and the Scottish Parliament must ensure this happens.

Only last year did I request my local MP, Tom Harris (Lab) to ask the UK Parliament to create equality between Gaelic and English, in the same way there is with Welsh. Quite appropriately, he raised his EDM on Saint David’s Day. Despite coverage in the Highland Press and some activity on Social Media Sites, the UK government’s response was ‘no’! Of course, despite my optimism, I expected this outcome.

However, I expect better from the Scottish Government, and indeed yourself – The Scottish Parliament. You have demonstrated, particularly in the past few years, that you understand the needs of the Scottish people – those who live here in Scotland.
As a result, I would like for the Scottish Parliament to ask the Scottish Government to work with the Scottish Electoral Commission and test a bilingual ballot paper – or trilingual ballot paper if Scots were to be included too. I believe both the Scottish Government and The Scottish Parliament have a legal obligation to ensure at least this happens.

This legal obligation, I believe, is included in the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and in the strategic planning of Bòrd na Gàidhlig in relation to making sure Gaelic is used at national events. So please, test a bilingual / multilingual ballot paper and share the findings and the conclusion and recommendations.

But in a final point, I would like to go one step further. I would like for Gaelic to be used in General Elections too – starting with 2016. Make it happen! After all, we used Gaelic for the Scottish Census 2011, so it can be done!

On the 2nd of October 2012, the National Gaelic Language Plan was debated in the Chamber. Here is an excerpt from the Official Report where The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland’s Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan) states that the language should be used:

**Dr Allan:** Agus gu duine sam bith a faighneachd carson a tha mi a’ cleachdadh na Gàidhlig an seo an-diugh anns a’ Phàrlamaid, canaidh mi seo: direach anns an aon dóigh nach eil cù ga thabhasann airson na Nollaig a-mhàin, chan eil cânann sam bith ann airson a’ mòid no airson Bòrd na Gàidhlig no airson planachean Gàidhlig. Tha cânanan ann airson cleachdadh agus bruidhinn, agus ma tha a’ Ghàidhlig agaibh, bruidhinnibh i.

To anyone who asks why I am using Gaelic in Parliament today, I say that, just as a dog is not just for Christmas, the Gaelic language is not just for the Mòd, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Gaelic plans. The language is there to be spoken. If you have the language, speak it.

He may be addressing the youth of today, but the Parliament is still young and I believe is entitled to be included as a stakeholder being addressed. The Parliament must also use the language more often, as should the Scottish Government.

As an aside, it is perhaps the right time to consider the statement in the Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament that for Gàidhlig to be used in the Scotland’s Parliament, permission must be sought. This subservient relationship to English use in our nation’s Parliament – where permission to use English is not required - cannot help the status of the Gaelic in achieving equal status in any way whatsoever.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my views with the Scottish Parliament.

Le gach deagh dhùrachd,

Dihaoine, 29 Màrt 2013