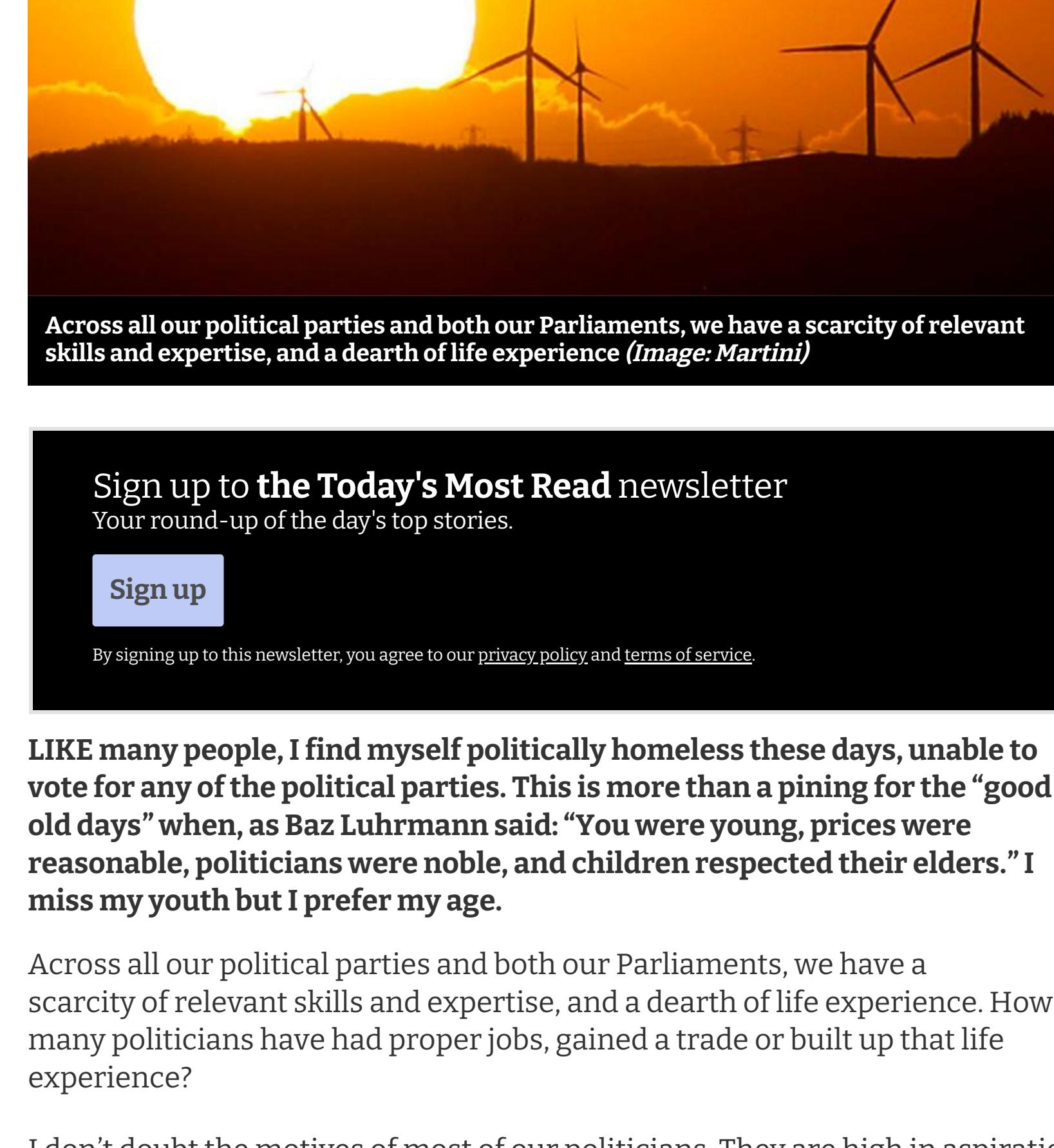


COMMENT

Politicians lack experience to capitalise on Scotland's energy future

19TH APRIL ENERGY RENEWABLES UK GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NATIONAL GOVERNMENT POLITICS SCOTLAND

By Simon Forrest
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Across all our political parties and both our Parliaments, we have a scarcity of relevant skills and expertise, and a dearth of life experience (Image: Martini)

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LIKE many people, I find myself politically homeless these days, unable to vote for any of the political parties. This is more than a pining for the "good old days" when, as Baz Luhrmann said: "You were young, prices were reasonable, politicians were noble, and children respected their elders." I miss my youth but I prefer my age.

Across all our political parties and both our Parliaments, we have a scarcity of relevant skills and expertise, and a dearth of life experience. How many politicians have had proper jobs, gained a trade or built up that life experience?

I don't doubt the motives of most of our politicians. They are high in aspiration but sadly low on delivery. For many, the primary focus seems to be personal political progress at the expense of public service – too many love the graft.

We have a shortage of experienced talent in high government and institutional positions – very little execution, delivery, "get the job done". With last year's influx of new MPs and as we see a prospective new intake to the Scottish Parliament starting to jostle for position, I see the familiar pattern – student politics, social science degree; a research job for an MP/MSP.

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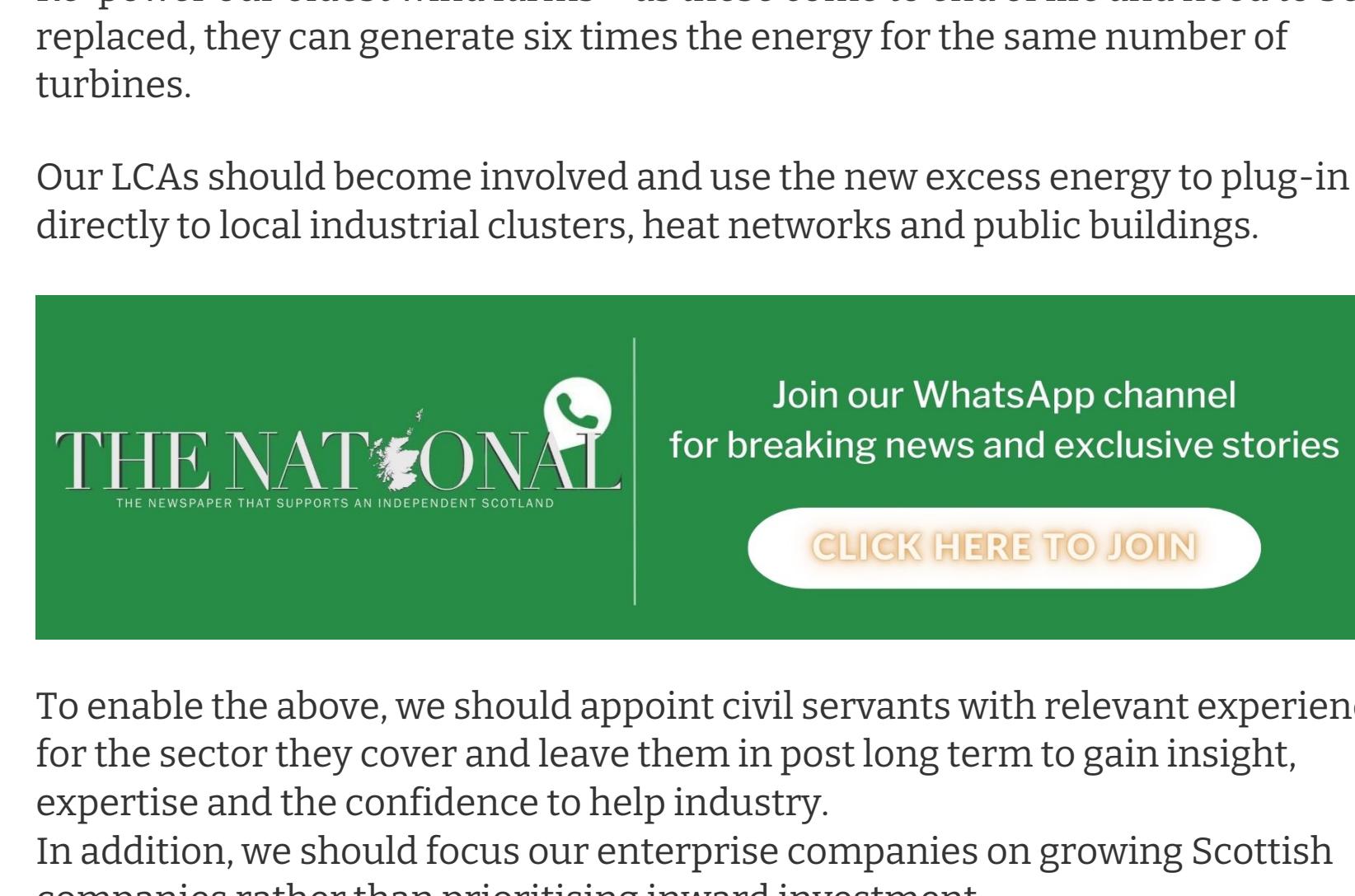
Hot-house flowers with very shallow roots. Lots of raw talent, but a famine of experience.

The Energy & Industrial Landscape in Scotland

TAKE for example the energy and industrial sectors. I haven't spoken with a single professional in these sectors who thinks our politicians (current or in the past few decades) have done a good job. Scotland has coal, oil, gas and renewables, an excessive embarrassment of energy, but it also has some of the highest prices for electricity in Europe. Don't take my word for it:

"Scottish families pay the highest electricity bills in Great Britain. Standing charges are 50% higher than in London. And the fact that we have a single national wholesale price for the unit rate means that Scottish families don't benefit at all from the enormous energy resources available in Scotland and have among the highest wholesale prices in Europe."

"Two-thirds of Scottish businesses say high energy costs have negatively influenced hiring decisions. And 77% of Scottish businesses say that high energy costs have forced them to put up prices." Greg Jackson, CEO, Octopus Energy



Greg is a champion of zonal pricing, which would help reduce energy bills in Scotland. He is correct that it would help but it wouldn't solve the underlying deficiencies we have when it comes to energy and industrial strategy.

The Challenge

WE are watching the atrophy of Scotland's economy and population. We have a combination of deliberate wealth extraction, the spread of dependency culture and a population that is significantly under-employed, particularly in the private sector.

We need industry to help solve this but why would industry invest here when energy is so expensive?

As well as the cost and security of energy, a further challenge with regards to industrial strategy is that it needs expertise, experience and a transgenerational perspective.

It needs the wisdom and life experience forged in multiple sectors over decades.

The most serious problems our energy and industrial sectors face are not technical. They are wider political, structural and cultural issues – plastic politics, perverse regulation and short-termism.

It's easy to say: "Our electricity is some of the most expensive in Europe, it's all Westminster's fault." This is only part of the problem.

THE Immediate Energy Opportunities

EVEN within the handcuffed position of devolution, we have many open goals in Scotland which we are failing to convert. I see the following as substantial opportunities:

- District Heating – a national district heating company;
- Local council authority (LCA) ownership of assets (Local authority energy companies);
- Linking permission for renewable energy projects to the percentage of Scottish components and services (in-country value);
- The right to invest in energy projects (on equal or better terms) for communities and councils;

Re-power our oldest wind farms – as these come to end of life and need to be replaced, they can generate six times the energy for the same number of turbines.

Our LCAs should become involved and use the new excess energy to plug-in directly to local industrial clusters, heat networks and public buildings.



To enable the above, we should appoint civil servants with relevant experience for the sector they cover and leave them in post long term to gain insight, expertise and the confidence to help industry.

In addition, we should focus our enterprise companies on growing Scottish companies rather than prioritising inward investment.

The Long-Term Energy AND Industrial Vision

WHERE is our long-term vision for Scotland? What will success look like in 2030, 2040, 2050? What is the strategy for our children to prosper here?

At present, Scotland exports most of its energy for others to benefit from its potential and value. Our wealth is extracted in low form to be capitalised elsewhere. Ultimately, an economy is always built on people, energy and the fundamental attributes of a nation (land, sea, global geo-position, natural resources etc). Secure energy is a cornerstone of a strong economy. Industry will not invest if it does not have access to secure and affordable energy. Scotland has neither, despite being one of the most energy-rich nations on the planet.

The Fundamentals

BUT here's the rub. In any walk of life – **business**, sport, politics – you can have the greatest vision, an ambitious mission and the best strategy but you deliver nothing without talented, experienced and dedicated teams. In our parliaments, governments and institutions, we need professionals who have had a "proper job" before going into public service.

We are being suffocated by lifelong professional politicians rising to the top having never run a business, or worked in an acute hospital ward or a night shift in a **Glasgow** city-centre police station.

We need politicians with life experience, job expertise and wisdom. We need hard-nosed businesspeople with compassion, job-seen-it-done-and-it-doctors and nurses; and seasoned police officers.

It may be unfashionable to say this in our age of youth, influencers and social media personalities but if Scotland is to thrive, we need Tartan Todas with force, wisdom and determination.

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