

Beat: Politics

UK scrambles to respond as support for Scottish independence grows

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USPA News - Scotland will receive more power if people vote against an independent Scotland this month, the British government announced on Sunday, hours after a new poll showed that those in favor of breaking away from the United Kingdom has reached a new high. British finance minister George Osborne, speaking on the BBC, said a plan would soon be unveiled that will grant the Scottish government more control over the decisions that affect Scotland.

He said the measures had already been agreed on by all three major parties in the British parliament and expressed hope that the announcement would satisfy the demands of the Scottish people. "You will see in the next few days a plan of action to give more powers to Scotland, more tax powers, more spending powers, more plans and powers over the welfare state, and the timetable for delivering that will be put into effect the moment there is a 'No' vote in the referendum," Osborne said. "A clock will be ticking for delivering those powers and then Scotland will have the best of both worlds. They will both avoid the risks of separation but have more control over their own destiny, which is where I think most Scots want to be." The announcement came just hours after a new YouGov poll, conducted for the Sunday Times, revealed that those in favor of Scottish independence have taken a narrow lead for the first time. Public support for an independent Scotland has increased rapidly in recent weeks, with the historic referendum now less than two weeks away. "In the past four weeks, support for the union has drained away at an astonishing rate. The 'Yes' campaign has not just invaded 'No' territory, it has launched a blitzkrieg," said YouGov President Peter Kellner. "Seldom has the term 'knife-edge' carried such lethal force. A two-point gap is too small for us to call the outcome. But the fact that the contest is too close to call is itself remarkable, as 'Better Together' seemed to have victory in the bag." The poll results showed that 51 percent of voters who have already made up their mind are now in favor of breaking away from the United Kingdom, while 49 percent wishes to remain in the union. The poll excluded people who said they were not going to vote and those who have not yet decided. Kellner said only Conservative voters remain overwhelmingly against an independent Scotland, as 93 percent of Conservative voters say they plan to vote 'No' in the referendum. But all other sections of Scottish society are on the move, most noticeably among supporters of the Labour party, where 35 percent of voters intend to vote 'Yes' - up from 18 percent a month ago. "The 'No' campaign has turned off large numbers of voters. By two-to-one, Scots say 'Better Together' has been negative - and by the same margin, they feel 'Yes Scotland' has been generally positive," Kellner explained. "This sense that (Scottish First Minister) Alex Salmond is offering an optimistic future has energized younger, Labour and working class voters who have switched to 'Yes' in the hope of more progressive policies that London can't stop." Last month, Martin Boon of ICM Research cautioned that the outcome of referendums with an unprecedented high turnout is difficult to predict, and Sunday's poll is all but conclusive. "By definition, pollsters know less about prior non-voters than voters, and if a poll contains many more prior non-voters than usual, then another little layer of uncertainty about the efficacy of a poll has been added," he said. The referendum is scheduled to take place on September 18 after British Prime Minister David Cameron and Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond signed the historic "Edinburgh Agreement" in October 2012, which granted the Scottish government the special powers necessary for an independence referendum. It followed months of negotiations on the specific details of the agreement. Cameron has vowed to keep the United Kingdom united and the British government has become increasingly vocal in its stance against Scottish independence, with officials warning Scotland that it would not be able to keep the pound as its currency if it breaks away from the union. A newly-independent Scotland would also force its departure from the European Union (EU) until it can negotiate its entry on its own. If Scottish voters choose to break away from the United Kingdom, the proposed date of independence would be March 24, 2016, following the dissolution of the current Scottish Parliament, which is expected to dissolve at 11:59 p.m. the day before. March 24 is also the anniversary of both the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and the signing of the Acts of Union in 1707.

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