

Beat: Technology

Scotland to become independent in March 2016 if referendum passes

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USPA News - Scotland will break away from the United Kingdom and become an independent country in March 2016 if voters approve next year's referendum on the issue, the Scottish government announced on Sunday, even though polls continue to indicate such an event is unlikely at the moment. The proposed date of independence is included in the Scottish government's white paper which will be published on Tuesday.

March 24, 2016, follows the dissolution of the current Scottish Parliament which is expected to take place 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. Scottish Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon described the white paper as "the most detailed and comprehensive blueprint" ever published for an independent country as it runs to 670 pages with more than 170,000 words. It sets out, in five parts and over the course of 10 chapters, the independence prospectus on which people will vote in the referendum on September 18 next year. "It is a landmark document which sets out the economic, social and democratic case for independence," Sturgeon said. "It demonstrates Scotland's financial strengths and details how we will become independent - the negotiations, preparations and agreements that will be required in the transition period from a vote for independence in September next year to our proposed Independence Day of 24th March 2016 and in time for the first elections to an independent Scottish Parliament in May of that year." The white sheet, which will first be presented at the Glasgow Science Center, will be available to anyone who requests a hard copy and has also been produced in tablet size to make it easy to read for voters, who can download the document as an e-book. A summary of the document will also be available in print and online. "The guide describes what a newly independent Scotland will look like," Sturgeon explained. "It illustrates how the powers of independence can be used to benefit individuals, families, communities and the nation as a whole - and it answers a range of detailed questions that we have been asked." The deputy first minister encouraged everyone in Scotland to get a copy of the document and use it to make a decision for next year's referendum. "The document is very deliberately designed to be accessible and readable and it will be widely available to the public, with further details being made public in due course," she added. "We want as many households in Scotland as possible to have a copy." In October 2012, British Prime Minister David Cameron and Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond signed the historic "Edinburgh Agreement" which grants the Scottish government the special powers necessary for an independence referendum. It followed months of negotiations on the specific details of the agreement. Alistair Carmichael, the UK's Secretary of State for Scotland, on Friday urged Scottish voters to make sure they have all the facts they need to make an informed choice for the referendum. "There's now less than a year to go until voters in Scotland make what will be one of the most important decisions of their lives," he said. Carmichael added: "Nobody should be under any illusions about the importance of this vote. If Scotland decides to go it alone then this will be an irreversible decision so it's certainly not something to undertake lightly. With time fast running out, it's important that people make sure they're up to speed and have all the facts they need." Cameron has vowed to keep the United Kingdom united, and there are signs that support among Scots for independence continues to slip. A survey released by pollsters TNS-BMRB earlier this month indicates only 25 percent of Scots are currently in favor of Scotland becoming an independent state, while 43 percent of those asked said they are not in favor of independence. But about 32 percent of Scots indicated they are still unsure about what they will vote, and half of all voters first want more information on the economy and employment in order to make a final decision. More than a third of voters also want to know more about pensions and benefits while 31 percent is looking for more information on taxes. "Having previously highlighted that many feel they are lacking information, this poll clearly shows that the financial issues are of greatest concern to the voters," said Tom Costley, head of TNS Scotland. "The high number of don't knows suggests that both sides need to do much more to ensure that people are confident about the implications of their vote for their financial future." The survey also suggested that the referendum could be set for a high turnout, with approximately 66 percent of adults saying they are certain to vote, and a further 14 percent very likely to vote. This compares with a turnout of 50.4 percent in the 2011 elections to the Scottish parliament, and the 63.8 percent Scottish turnout in the 2010 general election.

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