

# **Foreign Secretary tries to rein in trips abroad – by Scottish Ministers**

**The SNP has said the UK Government is “paranoid and insecure” about Scotland having a strong voice on the world stage – amid attempts to shut down Scotland’s international engagement.**

Foreign Secretary James Cleverly has issued the warning in a letter to UK diplomats saying that other countries should not to arrange meetings with Holyrood ministers without the involvement of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Angus Robertson the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture was in the middle of a US trip when the news broke. I asked him whether he would be heeding the direction from the Foreign Secretary. Although he did not say so directly it seems that the directive may well be disregarded.



He said: "I make absolutely no apologies for wanting to promote Scotland to support Scottish culture, Scottish heritage, but also boosting jobs, investment growth, and our

educational links – yes with the United States, our biggest single overseas market, but throughout the world as well.

“We’ve got a real opportunity with open doors and friends on all of the continents, and we should do everything that we can to embrace that. In the United States, we’ve got a particular hook, this is the 25th year of National Tartan Day, which is actually a celebration of the contribution of Scots to the United States.

“But at the same time, it’s also an opportunity to showcase Scotland and to say to people here, come visit, come invest, come study, come live, come enjoy everything that Scotland has to offer. And it’s massively popular as we can see. So The Scottish Government works very hard to support the American Scottish community in organising these events – we’ve been doing that for the last 25 years, and we will continue doing that into the future.”

Asked if he was simply going to ignore what Mr. Cleverly has written to the UK diplomats, Mr Robertson replied: “Well, I’ve got a job to be getting on with, and my job is to promote Scotland, internationally. And I think there are huge advantages in doing that. Some may be more obvious, some are less obvious. Of course, something that involves heritage and culture will be a boost to people coming to Scotland.

“Our national cultural institutions are here in New York, promoting Scotland, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the V&A in Dundee, the National Theatre for Scotland and many other besides. But there’s more than that, as well. There’s the cooperation between Scottish universities and American universities, we have a burgeoning alumni scene in the United States of America. And we can’t forget the fact that the United States is the biggest single overseas market that Scotland has.

“And we’ve had, amongst other things, a significant cohort of

young tech entrepreneurs from Scotland coming here to seek venture capital and investment and The Scottish Government, Scottish Development International, are working very hard to do everything that we can to support economic growth, jobs and investment.

“So it’s a huge opportunity quite apart from being really enjoyable, and it’s so nice to meet Americans from all kinds of backgrounds, and in fact, people from other kinds of pipe bands here from Belgium and Australia. And it’s an amazing calling card for Scotland. We had the Empire State Building last night, bathed in blue and white. So I think New York City has taken tartan day to heart, certainly after 25 years, and it’s just growing from strength to strength.”

I repeated the question if he was going to ignore what Mr. Cleverly had said to which he replied: “Well, I’m not really sure what what is being said, because The Scottish Government, under the SNP and other parties previously worked very hard to promote Scotland internationally. That’s what they did. That’s what we’re doing. That’s what we’re going to continue doing in the future.

“I’m happy to work with the UK Foreign Office, when they’re working in Scotland’s interests. And in the meantime, we’re going to do what we’ve always done, which is to promote Scotland at home and abroad.

“Yes, it’s about our historic connections. Yes, it’s about heritage. Yes, it’s about a view of Scotland’s past. But it’s also about Scotland’s future, to better cultural connections. It’s about our mutual economic benefit. It’s about the educational cooperation that we have, and much, much else besides.

“I’d like to take the opportunity of thanking everybody that’s involved in Tartan Day and Tartan Week in New York City. But there are events right across the United States, across

Canada, in Australia and other countries, celebrating the role of Scots to all of these countries, but also the relationships that we have with one another.

“And we’d be missing a trick if we weren’t doing everything that we can to work with our friends internationally. More than 40 million people claim to have Scottish descent, and we have a growing number of people who have an affinity with Scotland. They may not have been born in Scotland, maybe they studied in Scotland or visited Scotland, or just like Scotland.

“We should do everything that we can to foster that goodwill. And that’s why The Scottish Government has launched a Scottish connections framework here at Tartan Day, which is all about how do we make sure that we are best connected with the Scottish diaspora? How can we make the most of that to the benefit of the diaspora communities, but also present day Scotland so that we have all of the advantages of what is an amazing diaspora that has been so successful internationally, reflecting the high esteem in which Scotland is held so we should make the most of it.

“The Scottish Government is doing everything that we can to support that and we will continue that in the years ahead.”





The UK Government was represented by Scotland Office Minister John Lamont MP seen walking up Sixth Avenue here with Ian Murray MP and representatives from DIageo and the Tattoo PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

SNP Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Drew Hendry MP, said Tory attempts to silence Scotland would “backfire and strengthen support for independence”.

He said the UK government crackdown showed it knows its deeply undemocratic stance towards Scotland is “becoming an embarrassment to its reputation internationally”.

Mr Hendry said: “This clumsy attempt to silence Scotland shows the UK Government is paranoid and insecure about Scotland having a strong voice on the world stage.

“The Tory government knows its deeply undemocratic stance towards Scotland is becoming an embarrassment to its reputation internationally, which has already been shot to bits by Brexit and its repeated breaches of international law.

“This latest Tory attack on devolution shows weakness, not

strength – it will backfire and strengthen support for independence.

“The only people who are not adhering to and respecting the devolution settlement are the UK Government – who are riding roughshod over the powers of the democratically-elected Scottish Parliament left, right and centre.

“The more they attack devolution and try to censor Scotland’s parliament, the more Westminster shows independence is essential to protecting Scotland’s interests.”



Angus Robertson MSP Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture PHOTO Martin P McAdam

