

Question raised at Westminster over Scottish Government's international relations

Today in the House of Commons, SNP MP, Drew Hendry, raised the question of UK government guidance to Scottish Ministers about overseas travel with the Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly.

Mr Cleverly issued guidance to UK diplomats last month, suggesting that any foreign travel by Scottish ministers would be subject to approval from Westminster.

The SNP say that the value of The Scottish Government's international activity was demonstrated with the announcement of a Japanese company's intentions to build a new subsea cable factory in the Highlands. The announcement, from Sumitomo Electric Industries, came following a three day visit to Japan by Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy, Neil Gray MSP.

Drew Hendry MP said: "Tory guidance urging UK diplomats to curb the ability of Scottish Government Ministers arranging meetings with their overseas counterparts will have a disastrous impact on Scotland's ability to secure foreign investment if acted upon.

"Scottish Government Ministers should be free to build links

abroad and fly the flag for Scotland, after all we know that with such visits comes great opportunities to create new jobs and investment in Scotland.

“The announcement just last week from Sumitomo Electric Industries is concrete proof of that – why then is the UK government so intent on sabotaging investment in Scotland?

“It’s clear the petty politics of the Tories comes before securing economic success and links with the rest of the world – concepts that must seem alien to a Tory government that is imposing an economically disastrous Brexit on Scotland, backed by Brexit-supporting Labour.

“The only party standing up for Scotland on the world stage and promoting an outward looking, progressive nation is the SNP, and it’s clear we can only continue to do that with the full powers of independence.”

Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, responded following a question put by Mr Hendry in the House of Commons (“Scottish Government Minister, Neil Gray MSP and Scottish Development International and HIA have proved that direct engagement works for Scotland by securing £300 million manufacturing investment – manufacturing investment in subsea cables in the renewables industry working with Sumimoto in Osaka – it’s a game changer that is welcomed across the Highlands. Why does the Foreign Secretary seek to sabotage such vital economic activity by instructing UK diplomatic staff to hinder Scottish Government direct engagement?)

Mr Cleverly replied: “The competencies of The Scottish Government and the reserved position of the UK Government are clear. You are absolutely clear. And I would say to him and the House that Scotland has an excellent advocate overseas – it’s me.”

You can watch the exchange from this point in the afternoon’s proceedings here:

<https://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/707bbf3c-363e-4c20-be3c-3a529a59d917?in=15:20:45>

Desiree Brock MP also asked Mr Cleverly this: “Will the Foreign Secretary explain exactly how on earth he thinks the diplomatic staff now to be overseeing meetings between Scottish Ministers and Ministers from other countries and Governments will prevent discussion of whatever topics his Government decide are forbidden? Given that foreign direct investment growth was so much higher in Scotland than the rest of the UK last year—14% against the rest of the UK’s 1.8% —why does he think that such draconian interference is useful or necessary?”

The Foreign Secretary responded: “I would have thought that [Scottish Ministers](#) were better served ensuring that the people of Scotland are supported, rather than seeing health outcomes head in the wrong direction and seeing tax rates head in the wrong direction. I can assure the hon. Member that every one of the diplomatic staff in the [FCDO](#) promotes Scottish interests overseas. I am very proud of the work that our officials do from [Abercrombie House](#), which is part of our UK headquarters in Scotland. I can assure her that, when it comes to promoting Scotland’s interests overseas, we continue to do so at all times.”

We asked The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture about this matter when we met him recently.

He said: “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.”

At the time we spoke to the Minister the advice was newly revealed and he admitted he was a bit unsure of it. He said: “I’m not really what is being said because the Scottish Government under the SNP and other other parties previously

worked very hard to promote Scotland internationally. That's what they did, that's what we're doing and 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."

Since then Mr Robertson has written to the Foreign Secretary.
[Read about that here.](#)