



Patrick Harvie MSP

Scottish Parliament, MG-18  
Holyrood, Edinburgh EH99 1SP  
Tel: 0131 348 6363  
Fax: 0131 348 5972  
RNID Typetalk 18001 0131 348 6363

Unit 3, 19 Argyle Court  
1103 Argyle Street  
Glasgow, G3 8ND  
Tel/Fax: 0141 221 6999  
RNID Typetalk 18001 0141 221 6999

[patrick.harvie.msp@parliament.scot](mailto:patrick.harvie.msp@parliament.scot)

Nicola Sturgeon MSP  
First Minister  
Scottish Government

cc Ruth Davidson MSP, Kezia Dugdale MSP, Willie Rennie MSP

17 August 2017

Dear First Minister,

I am writing, and copying this letter to the leaders of other Holyrood opposition parties, to begin a discussion about the disturbing political situation in the United States and its implications for Scotland.

I have been heartened to see the strong statements which have come from across the Scottish political spectrum in response to President Trump's disgraceful comments over recent days, in which he made excuses for the far right and drew a false equivalence between racist, white supremacist and explicitly Nazi activity, and those who seek to defend their communities against this threat.

However, given that Trump courted the support of the far right during his campaign, and placed far right individuals into positions of power within his administration, we should not feign surprise at these events. He is what we always knew him to be; what has changed is the overtness with which he now speaks and the degree of confidence he has given to his extremist supporters.

I cannot be alone in having received correspondence from constituents who are not only troubled, but feeling helpless and seeking practical actions they can take. They  
The Green MSPs aim at all times to operate best practice in complying with the Data Protection Act (1998). We would like to keep relevant information about your concerns on file and we may need to share this with our colleagues if the issues involved are relevant to their work in the Scottish Parliament. If you would prefer that we did not, please let me know.

are right that condemnation alone is not enough, and that as a country with a longstanding close relationship with the US, we have a responsibility to reconsider how we should conduct that relationship in this new and dangerous context. Given the global nature of the various strands of extremist ideology organising now in the US, we must also consider the extent to which this threat may grow here at home.

I am therefore setting out a series of suggestions below. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather the beginning of a discussion. Some of what I suggest may gain agreement, and other aspects may not. Further ideas may emerge which I have not considered. But I believe that it is extremely important that we begin this discussion now, rather than standing by as the situation worsens, whether in the US or here at home. As many people have already argued, this is a moment of political crisis and neutrality is not an option.

In December last year, once the US election result was known but before Trump's inauguration, I made the case during First Minister's Questions that our relationship with the US should be refocussed on those in office at state and city level who oppose what Trump stands for. This was in the context of his far right associations and his climate denial. I have been pleased that since then the Scottish Government has indeed made efforts to build links with those in the US who wish to give progressive leadership on issues such as equality and climate change, and I would urge you to consider how we might go further. There are many organisations in Scotland from community groups to trade unions and from single issue campaigns to churches which could make links with others in the US, to ask them how we can best support them and to act in solidarity. The Scottish Government should consider what action it can take to facilitate such efforts, perhaps in concert with the voluntary sector. No doubt there will also be US citizens living in Scotland who may wish to be part of such initiatives and who may have much to offer.

The possibility still exists that President Trump may make a state visit to the UK, and despite significant pressure the UK Government has still not cancelled its offer to arrange this. I hope that all political parties at Holyrood can agree to step up this pressure and make it clear to UK colleagues that to afford such a welcome would now be utterly unacceptable.

More positively, there is clearly also a need for discussion between governments within and beyond the UK about how to build resilience against far right ideology, and how to develop a coherent response to the threat it represents. I would ask what role the Scottish Government might play in beginning that dialogue.

We are also aware of course that the Trump Organisation retains a significant commercial presence in Scotland. It appears that few impartial observers in the US place much credence on the nominal separation between Donald Trump and his business interests. I would argue that both on principle and in the interests of avoiding tarnishing Scotland's own international reputation by association with the Trump

The Green MSPs aim at all times to operate best practice in complying with the Data Protection Act (1998). We would like to keep relevant information about your concerns on file and we may need to share this with our colleagues if the issues involved are relevant to their work in the Scottish Parliament. If you would prefer that we did not, please let me know.

brand, the Scottish Government must ensure that no form of political, operational or business support is given to any Trump enterprise in Scotland.

Turning to the possibility of an increase in far right activity at home, I naturally would not wish to overstate the current situation, but nor should we be complacent. The far right in this country has been fractured and disorganised in recent years, in terms both of electoral presence and street activism. However the continuation of that situation cannot be relied upon. The UK has already seen one far right political assassination during the EU referendum campaign, a peak in hate crime following the vote itself, and a shocking level of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment in much of the media. The recent Sun editorial referring to 'the Muslim problem' is only the latest example, but was in many respects a more explicit far right stance than has previously been seen. We should be willing to address the threat of far right ideology before it reaches the levels currently being seen in the US, rather than waiting for this to happen.

There is currently a review of hate crime under way, and this offers a context for reflection on some steps which might be taken, without leading to an immediate knee-jerk response. The review could, for example, be asked to consider whether the use of Nazi and far right symbols and gestures should be treated specifically as hate crimes, or whether the promotion of far right ideology should be treated as an aggravating factor in criminal offences, in the same way that prejudice is treated.

We should also examine how schools are dealing with the situation. They will have a responsibility in the context of the curriculum to address current events in the US and Europe, and to explore how modern far right ideologies relate to historical events. Schools are expected to explore issues such as the impact that discrimination has on people's lives, comparisons between more and less democratic societies, and aspects of domestic, European and global identity. All these themes are relevant to the current situation and we must ensure that as young people are forming their views of the world around them they are given a fully informed context, rather than being left to navigate the situation with only the polarised online debate to guide them.

Beyond curriculum, our schools will of course also be concerned with the experience of young people and about how to handle incidents of problem behaviour. Much progress has been made in improving the handling of discriminatory language, and improving anti-bullying policies to address the situation of marginalised groups, though of course we all recognise that there is more to do. We should consider whether existing monitoring procedures in relation to bullying and discrimination also properly address and record far right language and ideology, and whether teachers feel equipped to successfully challenge them.

Police Scotland has of course had to respond to the threat of extremism in a variety of forms in recent years. No doubt there will be aspects of its response to the threats posed by the far right which are intelligence-led and which cannot be the subject of a fully open public debate. However I would welcome an opportunity for the

The Green MSPs aim at all times to operate best practice in complying with the Data Protection Act (1998). We would like to keep relevant information about your concerns on file and we may need to share this with our colleagues if the issues involved are relevant to their work in the Scottish Parliament. If you would prefer that we did not, please let me know.

Government and opposition parties to discuss the situation as it pertains to policing in Scotland, either by way of briefings or an update to Parliament.

Finally, I would also hope that there will be broad agreement on the need for dialogue with groups likely to be threatened by far right activity, from mosques and synagogues to organisations working on LGBT+ issues, violence against women, refugee support etc, to ensure not only that they have the resources and support they need, but also that they are able to play leading roles in how our society debates these challenges.

I am sure that we all take this situation seriously, both in terms of our relationship with the US and the need to counter the messages of the far right at home. Some people may be tempted simply to dismiss this threat as one which is not as severe in Scotland as it is elsewhere. However I believe that would be complacent and dangerous, and I hope that you will agree on the need for a proactive stance. The empowerment and endorsement which the far right is feeling as a result of their apologist in the White House is not limited to the US itself, and the consequences could be profound. In this situation there are no bystanders, and there is no such thing as neutrality.

Sincerely,

Patrick Harvie MSP

The Green MSPs aim at all times to operate best practice in complying with the Data Protection Act (1998). We would like to keep relevant information about your concerns on file and we may need to share this with our colleagues if the issues involved are relevant to their work in the Scottish Parliament. If you would prefer that we did not, please let me know.