

Letter to America

Dear President Trump

I congratulate you on your installation as President. Your vision to create more jobs, revitalise US infrastructure, boost US take home pay and inject more life into US economic leadership is a bold one. We in the UK are also embarked on a similar task as we leave the EU. We too need to build more roads, railways, bridges, energy plants and water supply facilities. We too need to make more things for ourselves and import less to narrow our trade gap. Our two countries can indeed trade with each other more, as ours is a fair trade with a reasonable balance of imports and exports for each party.

Your proposals to produce more realistically priced energy will help restore your manufactures. Cheap energy is a vital part of a flourishing industry. Your plans to cut corporate and individual tax rates will energise entrepreneurs, spawn more investments, and allow people to keep and spend more of their earnings. That in turn creates demand which generates more jobs. The USA in recent years has pioneered much of the digital revolution and has done well in creating more companies and jobs in technology, but has suffered from Chinese, German and Mexican imports of industrial goods which could have been made more extensively in the USA. Tax reform, cheaper energy, a better regulatory climate and a President who supports manufacturing will make a difference.

Both the USA and the UK could benefit from an early free trade agreement between our own two countries. Fair trade which results in a sensible balance between the trading parties can enrich and enhance both sides. If our two countries draw one up and sign it, it will show the world that the USA is not afraid of fair trade, and it will put more weight behind the UK's intention to be an even more successful world trading nation open for business globally.

I was pleased to read you are planning a summit in due course with Mr Putin. The West has made mistakes in recent years with its military interventions in the Middle East. Some carefully planned joint working with Russia which also has a presence and diplomatic interests there might help achieve the important but more limited objective you have set in combatting ISIS. Past policy has suffered from conflicting and ambitious aims which have resulted in all too many civil and religious wars in the region.

The UK and the US can make common cause to strengthen NATO for our mutual defence. As one of the few countries that does hit the minimum 2% GDP target for defence spending, the UK is a natural ally in your campaign to get all NATO members to spend at least the minimum. If I tried only paying a portion of the insurance premium I owe to insure my home the insurance company would cancel the cover. Why are countries that want their allies support any different if there is a minimum? The EU does not allow its members to pay a lower subscription, and none of our EU friends short change the Commission.

I am pleased our Prime Minister will visit on Friday. There is plenty of scope to increase our joint working on intelligence, defence, trade, economic policy and general foreign policy. I wish you every success in tackling the problems in the USA that you have identified.

Yours etc

Visit to Forest School

I visited Forest School at the request of the Headteacher on Friday. I was shown the buildings, met the Head Boy and Deputy Head Boy, and discussed a wide range of issues about the success of the school and its future prospects. I explained that I had campaigned in the last Parliament for fairer funding for schools, as places like Wokingham have done poorly out of the grant formula in recent years. The government was elected on a promise to reform the grant allocations. The Secretary of State announced new proposals for 2018-19. I am pressing her to go further, as the gap between what we receive and what the best paid schools receive is still very large.

Contributions to this site

Some contributors have not responded to my appeal. I have to reduce the amount of time I am spending on moderating this site, which is now considerably more time than it takes me to write my pieces for it. As a result, from today I will not be publishing comments which are

1. Long
2. Part of a series of multiple comments the same day from the same person
3. Require me to investigate a named third party site or other sources to check out allegations about named people of named institutions.

I value all contributions from constituents, who are welcome to make a longer comment or comments on relevant issues under a local issues story. They should include the first part of their post code as an identifier if they want to submit long or multiple postings.

Discussions with the EU on departure

The EU is always quick to point out that there will be discussions about the details of our departure, and these are different from the discussions about our future relationship. Some in the Commission fondly imagine they can make a meal of the former. There is even talk of presenting the UK with a large leaving bill! A few people write into this site to ask if we have to pay it. Of course we don't.

There is nothing in the Treaty to provide for the calculation and presentation of a leaving bill. There is plenty in the Treaty to say the remaining member states need to have good relations with neighbouring countries in Europe. Presenting a big bill would be a violation of that part of the Treaty.

The truth is the UK has a share in a wide range of assets built up by the EU over the years we have been a member, including our small shareholding in the vast bond portfolio of the ECB, our share of the many expensive properties the EU institutions own and occupy and our share of the cash and other financial assets held by the EU. I doubt the EU will be totting them all up and wanting to send us our share. Our rights to those assets will be unenforceable once we leave.

Similarly, the EU has borrowed a lot of money whilst we have been members, to spend on itself and other countries in the Union. There is no enforceable claim on us for any part of that debt after we have gone. If they send us a bill we will tell them we will not be paying it. If I resign from a club which has borrowed money and has a valuable club house, I immediately lose my stake in the property and end any responsibility for the debts. If just after I left the club they sell the clubhouse and distribute some cash to members I don't get a share as a past member. The assets and the liabilities are assumed by the remaining members. When a new nation joins the EU it signs up to share in the present and future assets and liabilities for the duration of its membership.

Some in the EU seem to think we should be liable for the pensions of Euro officials who happen to live in the UK and are UK nationals. It is difficult to see the logic behind this. They acted as EU officials, as EU citizens, and swore an oath to the EU. No-one asked the UK to underwrite their pensions at the time they were accruing them. Surely the EU has to accept it incurred the debts and it needs to meet them. It is a pity it didn't invest the money from the pension contributions at the time, because then there would be no future problem.

The UK will have to pay the pensions of all those UK civil servants who have been effectively working for the EU for many years putting in place all their regulations and directives in the UK. The UK promised to pay their pensions and we will keep that promise. I was pleased to see senior German politicians now talking about how they will need a trade deal with us to keep their exports flowing. This is an early sign of some realism returning

to the continental debate.