

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 30 November 2004

Session 2

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE **20th Meeting 2004, Session 2**

CONVENER

*Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind)

*Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP)

*Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)

*Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab)

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab)

*Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP)

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Susan Stewart (British Embassy, Washington DC)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

ASSISTANT CLERKS

Nick Hawthorne

David Simpson

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 30 November 2004

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 14:01]

Promoting Scotland Worldwide Inquiry

The Convener (Mr John Swinney): Good afternoon. I welcome members to the 20th meeting in 2004 of the European and External Relations Committee. I wish members a happy St Andrew's day.

Members: Hear, hear.

The Convener: I do not wish to be controversial from the chair, but I am sure that we all wish Mr Canavan well with his proposed member's bill and his members' business debate tomorrow night.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): Thank you.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): Long may it supersede tartan day.

The Convener: I thank Mr Home Robertson for adding a note of consensus to our proceedings, as always.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): He has got us off to a good start.

The Convener: Exactly. I am sure that it is a taste of what is to come.

There is only one item on our agenda today, which is the continuation of our promoting Scotland worldwide inquiry. We have with us Susan Stewart, who is first secretary for Scottish affairs at the British embassy in Washington. I am grateful to her for making herself available to address the committee today and to answer our questions, and for agreeing to switch the original date of this evidence-taking session to accommodate congestion in ministerial diaries—to put it politely—so that ministers can give evidence at next week's meeting. I invite her to make some introductory remarks, which will be followed by questioning.

Susan Stewart (British Embassy, Washington DC): I am currently employed by the Scottish Executive as first secretary for Scottish affairs at the British embassy in Washington DC. The establishment of the post was announced in

April 2001 and I took up the job on 1 October that year.

This is Scotland's first dedicated diplomatic post. My broad remit is to promote Scotland in the United States. I hope that some of the evidence that the committee has received from the United States and in annex C of the Executive's submission, on the Scottish affairs office, have given members a flavour of how diverse the job can be. It ranges from promoting Scotland through activities such as tartan week to liaising with Scottish universities and doing outreach with Scottish-American organisations. My office is a resource for all of Scotland: local government, non-departmental public bodies and agencies, Scottish academics and, not least, the Parliament.

I am pleased to be here this afternoon and to have been given the opportunity to give evidence in such an important inquiry, which I hope will inform how we progress our work in the United States.

The Convener: Thank you. I should have said that the committee visited the United States a few weeks ago.

Mr Home Robertson: Some members did.

The Convener: There is a protocol in standing orders that the convener should be allowed to speak without interruption.

Mr Raffan: Hear, hear.

The Convener: Members of the committee visited the United States and were grateful for the assistance that we were given by Susan Stewart and her colleagues in the Scottish affairs office at the British embassy in arranging our programme, which has informed the inquiry.

As you said, Susan, this is the first time that the position of first secretary for Scottish affairs has been established. What has been the greatest impact of your work in relation to the Scottish Executive's work in the United States in the course of the past few years?

Susan Stewart: To some extent, it might be for others to judge the office's achievements, and I hope that some of the evidence from the United States does that. However, I point to four key achievements. Establishing the office from scratch early allowed relatively quick progress to be made on tartan week, which is one—and only one—aspect of the promotion of Scotland in the United States. This year saw the largest ever tartan week celebration, with more Scottish organisations taking space in Central park than ever before. The Scotland at the Smithsonian folklife festival last year was a fairly direct consequence of the office being established. The Marshall scholars' visit to Edinburgh in April this year and the announcement of the third-year Scottish scholarship for Marshall

scholars were important developments. I chair tomorrow's leaders, which is a pilot internship programme funded by Scottish Enterprise Glasgow that puts students from Glasgow into blue-chip companies in the United States.

In addition, I generally raise the profile not only of the Executive but of the new Parliament in the various speaking engagements that I undertake throughout the United States and in the presentation that I do called "Scotland: A new democracy".

The Convener: Is that work focused on raising awareness of Scotland and its characteristics or is it focused on a more sharply pointed commercial, trade and business development role? If it is both, how do you balance the two?

Susan Stewart: For my office, it is both. Although my work is primarily in public diplomacy and raising awareness, I work closely with colleagues in Scottish Development International, which has four offices in the United States. Its specific remit is economic development and the business agenda, and I work with those colleagues by addressing the globalscot meetings and getting involved in their activities. However, my role is primarily to raise awareness of some of the strengths of contemporary Scotland. When you were in the United States, you probably got a flavour of the fact that many Scottish Americans are well-versed in the history and heritage of Scotland, but sometimes not so well-versed in the strengths of Scotland today. A lot of my work is aimed at increasing that awareness.

The Convener: Is that a softer briefing exercise, rather than the harder or more exclusive business development message that will come from organisations such as SDI?

Susan Stewart: I am not sure that I would use the word "softer"; my role is more generalist, although it depends on the audience. If it is a university audience at, for example, an undergraduate politics seminar, I do quite a hard sell of the fresh talent agenda and the fact that the Scottish four-year degree makes Scotland an ideal place for American students to do a junior year abroad or, indeed, a full undergraduate degree. If I am speaking to a St Andrew's society or a Scottish-American society, what I say necessarily touches far more bases, from the development of our Parliament to the strength of our universities, our strengths in biotechnology and our cultural renaissance.

The Convener: Will you share with the committee in a bit more detail how you relate to other organisations that have a responsibility for raising awareness of Scotland in the United States? Who are the key players with whom you are in contact?

Susan Stewart: Two of the key players are SDI and VisitScotland. It is important to note that, in Edinburgh, we have the Scottish international forum, which brings together players—mostly from the public sector, but also some from the private sector—with international interests. Out of that, and out of a paper that I gave to that forum last year, we established a tartan day working group to take forward Scottish plans for involvement in tartan week.

When it comes to co-ordination, there is always room for improvement. We are a small country that is trying to make an impact in one of the most powerful countries in the world. Progress has been—and continues to be—made. More people than ever before are involved in the preparations for tartan week.

The Convener: You said that progress is being made. From my experience of visiting tartan week events on a number of occasions over the past four years, I recognise that there has been an improvement in the scale of events and the effort that is put in, but I hope that we are not taking the view that tartan week is it. Is there a commensurate expansion of co-ordination and cohesion and of programmes that would broaden Scotland's presence in the United States so that the work goes beyond what is already involved in tartan day, tartan week and all that goes with that?

Susan Stewart: The Scotland at the Smithsonian festival was another good example of different agencies coming together for public diplomacy work. I am in regular contact with my colleagues in SDI and VisitScotland. As you know, VisitScotland does not have a dedicated office in the States and works through the British Tourist Authority, so I am in contact with VisitScotland in Edinburgh.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): What do you feel are the advantages of working in partnership with the embassy? Are there any ways in which that partnership could work a bit better?

In your submission, in the paragraph about working with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, you say that you have

"worked with others to identify gaps in ... promotional material".

Will you elaborate on those two points?

Susan Stewart: Working in the embassy gives me access to a range of information about United Kingdom-wide campaigns, such as the science and technology campaign, to which I might not otherwise get access. It also gives our office direct access to the consulate network in the United States and the press and public affairs network. I sit on the US public diplomacy strategy board, which is chaired by the ambassador. The idea

behind my being on that—my idea, at least—is to ensure that the promotion of Scotland is embedded in what the embassy and consulates do day in, day out and not just in what they do on St Andrew's day or during tartan week.

The Convener: Did you put yourself forward for that position or was it offered to you by the embassy?

Susan Stewart: I was asked to join the strategy board, which is a new body—it started up about six months ago.

The consulates throughout the country provide advice when we have visiting ministers or MSPs; they also provide advice on policy innovation in the states that they cover. Given the vast size of the United States, it would be difficult to have a finger on what was happening everywhere. In addition, the consulates distribute material that promotes Scotland.

I will mention some improvements that have taken place in the past three years. When I arrived, britainusa.com—the website that is run out of New York by British information services—did not have a dedicated Scottish section. I worked with British information services to get a dedicated Scottish section set up. At one point, an organisation that was promoting higher education in the UK was using material that included the line, "Study in the UK and get a degree in three years." We got that changed, so there is now dedicated material on education in Scotland from the British Council in Scotland.

Conferences have been organised at which civil servants from Whitehall and people working in public policy in the States have been brought together. There was a conference on citizenship and education. When I heard about it, I put those involved in touch with colleagues in the Education Department at Victoria Quay, because we were doing some interesting things on citizenship and education. Part of my role in the embassy is to remind colleagues that there is now more than one domestic policy agenda in the UK—there are at least three such agendas.

Irene Oldfather: I presume that you work in partnership with the Northern Ireland and Welsh offices. How does that work? Do they come to the meetings of the body that you mentioned?

Susan Stewart: Yes. The ambassador chairs weekly Monday morning meetings, which are attended by a crew of thousands: first secretaries and above, military and defence personnel and the Northern Ireland bureau. The Northern Ireland bureau also sits on the public diplomacy strategy board. However, separate from embassy-hosted events, I enjoy a close relationship with the bureau. We are working together to put on a

display at the National Conference of State Legislatures conference in Seattle next year.

By dint of the fact that the Northern Ireland bureau has been there for 14 years and has made some mistakes, it has been supportive and a good source of advice. That applies less to the Wales office, because it started after us, is based in New York and has a different role—the Welsh representative's activities are confined to public relations and marketing. However, I have contact with the Wales office and with representatives of Quebec.

14:15

Irene Oldfather: You cover a wide range of areas. Are resources an issue?

Susan Stewart: That is a question for people other than me. We have a small team—Stuart McLean, Carolyn Ritchie and me—and we will continue to try to do the best we can with the resources that are made available to us.

Dennis Canavan: Your written submission states that you have

"built up a contact database of over 1000 individuals and organisations with an affinity to and interest in Scotland."

How did you go about doing that? Did people and organisations contact you because they had heard about your presence, or did you have to be proactive, or even hyperactive, in looking for people to build up the database? How comprehensive is the database? Could you give us an idea not just of the numbers, but of the breadth of interests with which you have contact?

Susan Stewart: I will start with the last question first. The contacts range from business people—through the [globalscot](http://globalscot.net) network—to academics and the traditional cultural Scottish-American organisations, as well as individuals whom I have come across through public speaking. When I arrived at the embassy in October 2001, the consulates sent me a list of the Scottish contacts in their areas, which were confined mostly to the fairly traditional Scottish-American organisations. In the first two years, I was deliberately inclusive and tried to go to most events at which I was asked to speak. I had a blank sheet because we did not know how useful different organisations might be. Through that process, we have whittled down the list into different constituencies that are of differing value depending on the aspect of contemporary Scotland that we are trying to promote. The contact list should grow and we should never be satisfied. As members know, the United States is a large country. I hope that the list is just a base.

Dennis Canavan: The submission also mentions that

"Work is in hand to construct a Scottish Affairs Office website."

How is that work progressing? Will the website be specifically for an American audience or for a worldwide audience?

Susan Stewart: My website will be primarily for an American audience. I am speaking to designers about the issue, but, in essence, I envision a Scotland in the USA website, which will be a portal to many other sites that give specific information. Our office gets inquiries on issues that range from tourism to universities. Although those issues fall into other agencies' remits, it takes time to direct people to them. I hope that the website will be up and running by tartan day next year—I was hoping for Burns day, but that might not be realistic—and that it will serve as a portal to direct people to other organisations that might be more useful.

The website will also provide a good point of contact for Scottish-American organisations that seek easier ways to exchange information with one another about what is happening in their areas. I am perfectly relaxed about inviting Scottish-American organisations to link their societies' websites to mine and to have a comprehensive list of events in the United States that are to do with Scotland.

The Convener: Do you envisage that the website will be an all-Scotland gateway for people in the United States?

Susan Stewart: Yes. Two of the key sites to which it will link will be those of VisitScotland and SDI. In fact, we would probably want to have right up front links to four organisations: the Scottish Executive, the Scottish Parliament, VisitScotland and Scottish Enterprise. However, I am discussing the best method with web designers who have far more knowledge than I have about how people navigate sites.

The Convener: One issue that has struck members in the evidence that we have taken is the plethora of organisations that are doing something to promote Scotland overseas. For organisations such as VisitScotland the promotion of Scotland is a big chunk of their work; for other organisations, such as Scottish Screen or the Scottish Arts Council, it might be a tiny chunk. However, all that work has value—before we even consider higher or further education institutions. How people access information about Scotland in a different marketplace is a central issue, which is relevant not only in the context of the United States but across the board.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Are there British consulates throughout the USA, from coast to coast?

Susan Stewart: Yes.

Phil Gallie: I get the impression that the promotion of Scotland tends to concentrate on the east coast. Have we reached middle America and the west coast? Are we building on that?

Susan Stewart: Activity is concentrated on the east coast, but my office is increasing its activity on the west coast. I do not want to speak for SDI and VisitScotland, but both organisations are very active on the west coast as well as on the east coast. It is fair to say that the large chunk of America in between has perhaps not commanded as much attention from Scottish organisations as other parts of the USA have, with the laudable exception of Chicago, which has celebrated tartan week and has an active St Andrew's society that allows both women and men to join—not all such societies do that. The demographics of the Chicago society are younger and it is linked with a Scottish-American business forum.

There is anecdotal evidence of Scottish events and activities throughout the States, but if I were to visit every state I would be constantly on the road, which would not be very effective. We have adopted the Executive's approach, as have other organisations, which is that it is better to build up an initial head of steam and momentum in a small group of key states and cities than to spread ourselves too thinly. However, the consulates can distribute information on our behalf in the areas that I cannot get to.

Phil Gallie: How important are family links and heritage? Is interest in such matters spread across America or does it tend to be concentrated in certain areas?

Susan Stewart: It is spread across America. One of the most successful exhibitions at the Scotland at the Smithsonian event involved VisitScotland's ancestralscotland.com, with people being guided as they researched their family trees on computer. The event was queued out. There is a huge appetite in America for genealogical research and the clan societies are strong. When I speak to such societies people are sometimes surprised to hear that in Scotland we rarely think of ourselves as being part of a clan—we might think of ourselves as being from Glasgow or Edinburgh or from a certain area, but I do not necessarily think of myself as part of the Stewart clan.

Phil Gallie: Could you use your website to build on individuals' wishes to identify with their family links?

Susan Stewart: We could probably include a section from ancestralscotland.com.

Phil Gallie: You mentioned Burns day. We recently took evidence from the Robert Burns World Federation and we acknowledge the importance of that organisation. Is it strong in

America? Do you have links with branches over there?

Susan Stewart: I do not know what the total number of Burns societies is, but there are certainly some, which are often offshoots of St Andrew's societies. Most Scottish organisations in the States host a Burns supper, particularly because St Andrew's day is often problematic for them because it is so close to Thanksgiving, which is the biggest holiday in the States, as you know. Many Scottish organisations celebrate Burns day instead and many consulates host Burns suppers—not with real haggis, I hasten to add.

Phil Gallie: This is a personal issue and the convener will probably knock me on the head for raising it.

The Convener: You are inviting an intervention, Mr Gallie. Before we go any further, I caution you on the subject.

Phil Gallie: I take the caution, convener, but I will go ahead anyway.

In talking about our Burns heritage, I draw your attention to the current problems with the Burns Trust and Burns cottage in Alloway. If Scotland does not value either the building or the artefacts it contains, is there the potential to awaken America to the need to ensure that Burns cottage is there for the next 100 years?

The Convener: You just about got yourself back into order, Mr Gallie. Susan Stewart should feel free to answer the question about the use of Burns in the promotion of Scotland; the rest of the question concerned quite another issue.

Susan Stewart: Burns and his stature throughout the world are essential elements in the armoury that I use to promote Scotland. The first part of Mr Gallie's question was more concerned with domestic policy; it is therefore for others to engage with it.

Mr Raffan: First, I want to echo quickly the convener's thanks for all the hard work that you and your colleagues put into the organisation of the committee delegation's visit to the States and for the excellent support that you gave us.

In your opening statement, you repeated what you said in your submission, which is that the United States

"is a small country attempting to make an impact in a very large one."

The Convener: No—it is the other way round.

Mr Raffan: I am sorry; I cannot read my own handwriting. The submission said:

"Scotland is a small country attempting to make an impact in a very large one."

Susan, you have a small office and yet you say that you get an average of

"around 300 e-mails and 150 phone calls per week",

which is probably more than the average MSP gets, yet you have fewer staff. I realise that you cannot comment on resources, but do you do an annual audit that shows how your workload is increasing? I appreciate that the more work you do, the more work you create for yourself. In a sense, that is not all that different from the workload of an MSP: the more active we are, the greater the number of people who get in touch with us. Do you do an annual audit that shows the pressure building up on your office?

Susan Stewart: Yes, but to say that it is scientific would be to overstate the matter. If I were to do such an audit, I would not be promoting Scotland. Certainly, as the office gets better known, the amount of e-mails, letters and calls is increasing, which is one of the key reasons for the establishment of the website.

Mr Raffan: In the main, are you reactive rather than proactive? I am thinking of the number of invitations, requests and so forth that you get, not to mention the number of MSPs, Government ministers and the whole shebang who descend on you. How proactive can you be when those increasing demands are placed upon you?

Susan Stewart: The balance is changing. Certainly, our work was primarily reactive in the first two or two and a half years. That said, it was also opportunistic—Scotland at the Smithsonian, for example—and that will always be an important part of what our office does.

Now that Stuart McLean has transferred to the US, I am trying to carve out more space for myself in which to make linkages with the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Governors Association and so forth. Some of that work could be done in partnership with the Parliament. I want to put more emphasis on the development of policy linkages with US states and cities that have something in common with—or something to teach—Scotland. Indeed, some of the linkages might be made because we have something to teach the state or city. The balance is changing, but—as always—what we do is resource dependent. We cannot ignore visitors when they come.

Mr Raffan: I note from your submission that your remit runs to nine points. It is possible to boil it down, however. There is culture, involving, for example, the Smithsonian event, tartan day, liaison with St Andrew's societies and education, with the Marshall scholars and the tomorrow's leaders project. On the science and innovation front, you liaise with SDI, and on the tourism front, you liaise with the BTA. There is also the political

side of your work—on which I will focus in a second—which so far has seen you deal with local authority representatives, Executive ministers and MSPs who come over to the States. How do you prioritise all of that within the resources that you have at present?

Susan Stewart: To some extent, the priorities in respect of visitors set themselves. For example, over the past four months, the huge number of visitors has meant that other things have not had the attention that I would like to have given them. From mid-February until April, tartan week becomes a priority. Around September and October, I try to get around as many university organisations as I can, as that is when decisions are made about where young people might go for further study.

It is probably a fair criticism to say that, in the initial phase of establishing the office, we did not prioritise as effectively as we could have done. That was because of the tension between the need to have a narrow focus and the need to be inclusive by scoping the States to see what was out there and where the opportunities lay for Scotland.

Mr Raffan: Your submission says:

“As resources permit, it is planned that the Scottish Affairs Office will have a role in identifying key US legislatures”.

Where do you start? Do you start on Capitol hill and then go on to the National Conference of State Legislatures, then the National Governors Association and then the mayors, who are much more influential over there than they are here? It is never-ending and we would have to prioritise. I know that it is partly a policy decision, but how valuable would it be to build up a sort of Scottish caucus on the hill or in the NCSL to support your work?

14:30

Susan Stewart: I am not sure that we should start on Capitol hill because policy in the US is so devolved that links with individual states and cities might be more useful. The link with Baltimore grew out of the First Minister's meeting with Mayor Martin O'Malley in April 2004 after tartan week. Baltimore has a system called CitiStat, which is about getting better value for money from the money that is being put into public services. I note that that got a mention in the efficient government document that was published yesterday by the Executive.

At the moment we are engaged in scoping the political opportunities. However, I suspect that one of the conclusions of that will be that the NCSL and the National Governors Association would be more fruitful initial points of contact for the

Executive and perhaps also for the Parliament—that is up to you—than Capitol hill would be.

The Convener: Is the direction for the establishing of a Scottish caucus, whether on Capitol hill or in state legislatures, coming from ministers?

Susan Stewart: Ministers have not indicated a particular desire for a caucus on the hill per se. They are interested in building linkages that will help to inform Scottish public policy.

Mr Raffan: You said that it is up to us whether the Parliament is involved in that. However, will the scoping study suggest that the Parliament has a role now that it has established itself?

Susan Stewart: You had discussions with the NCSL when you were out there, and I know that Parliament has had a lot of contact with the NCSL during the past couple of years. The Parliament hosted an NCSL delegation for the opening of the Parliament building and the NCSL is certainly keen to work with the Parliament. The fact that I am out there and can attend meetings of the NCSL means that we might be able to find a new way of working.

Mr Raffan: Coming back to tartan day, I note that your submission makes the point that that is primarily an American celebration; it is theirs and not ours. In a sense we are developing different ways of piggy-backing on it. Do you feel that the balance is right in terms of the amount of time and effort that it requires of you and your office? Does the day still have potential value for us to piggy-back on issues such as education and the economy?

Susan Stewart: I think that tartan day has huge value. Yes, it is an American celebration. To be candid, we would not have chosen 6 April and we probably would not have called it tartan day or tartan week. It was passed by a Senate resolution, it exists and, in the view of the Executive and the Parliament, which has sent a cross-party delegation in the past few years, the universities, SDI and VisitScotland, it provides a huge opportunity to showcase some of the excellence of contemporary Scotland.

In one pavilion last year, we showcased the new Parliament building, innovative design through Jill Blackwood, and a fresh talent exhibition. SDI had material there as did six of our universities. The day is using traditional iconography such as tartan and whisky to engender interest in some aspects of contemporary Scotland. Diplomats in Washington from other countries often say to me that they wish that they had a symbol that is as universally recognised as tartan.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I am sorry that I did not make it to Washington—perhaps another time.

We have been considering the European dimension as well as the American dimension. Do you have contacts with the Executive office in Brussels and do you see any pulling in different directions in the promotion of Scotland abroad?

Susan Stewart: When we were setting up the office, I informally sought the advice of colleagues in Brussels. We all work for the same department in Edinburgh, so that is the point of contact.

Public diplomacy is a much smaller aspect of the Brussels workload. The people there have the legislative angle to cover, as some 80 per cent of Scottish parliamentary competence is impacted on by Brussels. In terms of the promotion of Scotland, I think that we are all working along similar tracks, following the publication of the international strategy and with the continuing development of the international image project. Clearly, however, various aspects of a promotional strategy will play differently in various countries, depending on the culture of those countries and so on. However, the basic building blocks and so on are common to all efforts to promote Scotland.

Mrs Ewing: You talked about Wales briefly, saying that the Welsh were not as prominent in promoting their country as we are in promoting ours. However, Wales has a firmly established office in Brussels. Is there contact between the Scottish office and the Welsh office?

Susan Stewart: I can tell you only that, in my most recent discussion with the Welsh, which took place in New York, I learned that they are changing their procedure because the Welsh Executive has brought the NDPBs and economic development agencies into the mainstream civil service. They are going through a period of transition. We will see where that takes them.

Mrs Ewing: You have touched on various institutions and organisations. Do the churches have a role to play in the United States? We are told that a religious revival is under way across the pond.

Susan Stewart: Indeed.

Mrs Ewing: Churches in Scotland have strong links with churches in America. Are they involved in any way?

Susan Stewart: I constantly come across Scottish Presbyterian ministers in the United States. There are a number of St Andrew's societies and, frequently, it is an expatriate Scot, who trained in Edinburgh or Aberdeen, who gives the invocation. I am not aware of formal links, but that is something to bear in mind.

Mrs Ewing: If this committee or the Executive were to play the role of Santa Claus, what would be the best thing that we could do for your office in the United States? What would be the one Christmas present that you would want?

Susan Stewart: Clearly, public diplomacy potential is infinite, particularly in a place such as the United States, but resources are not. However, I am not sure that I would be comfortable giving you a "Dear Santa" letter.

Mrs Ewing: But if you did, it might involve a request for more money.

Mr Home Robertson: How much awareness is there in the USA about where and what Scotland is?

Susan Stewart: Compared to other small countries in Europe, we punch above our weight in terms of awareness. The Americans know that Scotland is a country and that it is different from England. Occasionally—much to my chagrin—we are confused with the Irish and, sometimes, some of our cultural icons, such as tartan, are appropriated by the Irish. There is a lot of awareness—more than you might expect—of our new constitutional settlement and a lot of interest in the new Parliament building, which is helping to sell Scotland internationally.

Mr Home Robertson: Thank you. I am glad that I asked that question.

Susan Stewart: We got a lot of inquiries about the Parliament building.

In preparation for the development of the international image campaign, the Executive conducted a study that suggested that, internationally—not just in the USA—our history was known but that the view tended to stop there and that people were not aware of our science base, our universities and so on. That is one of the misconceptions that I am trying to change in the USA.

Mr Home Robertson: That is helpful in that it shows that we have something to build on.

You referred to the National Conference of State Legislatures, a deputation from which some of us met before the Parliament building opened. I was impressed by our meeting, which was anchored by the American consul in Edinburgh. From that meeting, I got the impression that there was quite a lot of interest in our arrangements and that there was perhaps a shared identity between this Parliament, with its devolved authority, and state legislatures in the USA, which have broadly equivalent powers. What scope is there to develop direct one-to-one links with individual states either at member level or between the Scottish Parliament information centre and other libraries?

Susan Stewart: There is huge potential for development for the Parliament, the Scottish Executive and SPICe. For example, there is enormous interest in the way in which Scotland achieved such a radical constitutional change peacefully. People are also interested in our committee system, which is far more akin to the American system than it is to the traditional Westminster model, and in the fact that the Scottish Parliament has the third highest proportion of women members of any legislature. Indeed, I mentioned that in my presentation. Finally, there is great interest in the Parliament building.

The Convener: You said that, in the embassy, you function basically as a reminder of Scotland and mentioned that, after your intervention, the *britainusa.com* website was amended to include Scotland. If that is happening in the British embassy in Washington, which has a first secretary of Scottish affairs, what is going on in other British embassies around the world?

Susan Stewart: That question is for colleagues who deal with that matter—or indeed the minister—to answer. However, I know that there is regular contact between colleagues in Edinburgh and colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London to ensure that it has up-to-date promotional materials for Scotland that it can distribute through its network. I am assured that today, for the first time, the saltire is flying on the British embassy in Washington, which is good.

The Convener: It is rather pleasant to think about that on this Edinburgh afternoon.

Over the past three years, the resources for your team in the British embassy have expanded. However, that has not happened in isolation. You are also dependent on Scottish Executive support. Obviously, the more work you do, the more contacts you get and the more demands are placed on you, but has the increase in the level of support been commensurate with the increase in the level of activity?

Susan Stewart: Resources have increased for the divisions that deal with international relations in their broadest sense. Stuart McLean, who was transferred to Washington at the beginning of September, had been acting as a US policy officer in Edinburgh and has been replaced with a part-time position.

The Convener: Are there any plans to increase the hours of that post?

Susan Stewart: That is for others to decide.

The Convener: We all accept that the general US market is massive and has many different demands and pressure points. Are there any proposals to draw together input into the American

market from a variety of different Scottish organisations to ensure that our presence can punch a bit harder? To what extent are your office and the Executive involved in such work?

Susan Stewart: We are involved through the Scottish international forum and task-specific working groups such as those that have been set up for Scotland at the Smithsonian, tartan day or any of our other public diplomacy campaigns. When I am in Scotland, we try to convene a working group of interested parties that are engaged in promotional activity. However, the Scottish international forum is probably the primary body for such work.

The Convener: Evidence that we have taken from different participants in the forum suggests that, although the concept is good, the forum itself is unwieldy and does not provide sufficient focus for the presentation or promotion of Scotland overseas. You are a senior civil servant who represents Scotland abroad. What is the nature of your involvement in the forum? To what extent is the agenda set through the input of people such as you who operate out in the field and promote Scotland daily?

14:45

Susan Stewart: I give information to colleagues in Edinburgh who regularly attend the Scottish international forum. In September 2003, I presented a paper to the forum on tartan week. It is probably for others to comment on whether the forum is too unwieldy, but we set up the sub-group on tartan week because of how the forum deals with specific projects.

The Convener: Aside from that sub-group, have other focused priorities emerged from the international forum that are relevant to your work in the United States?

Susan Stewart: I am not aware of any yet.

Mr Raffan: The Scotland at the Smithsonian festival was successful. Do you have another such project in mind? When I was in New York, I noticed that the New York Public Library, which is renowned in the city for its exhibitions and is not just a library and a research facility, was sponsoring an Hellenic festival throughout New York's five boroughs, for which there was much publicity. Are you considering a Scottish cultural event for New York?

Susan Stewart: We have no plans for one, but we are happy to consider any proposals that come either from American cultural organisations or from organisations such as the Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Screen and the British Council Scotland that have the specific responsibility to promote Scottish culture.

Mr Raffan: John Home Robertson asked about contact with individual states. Initial contact would be through the NCSL, but how do you go beyond that to make contact with individual states? Do you go to important states such as New York, California and Illinois and to important cities such as Chicago? If not, do you consider states that have considerable populations of Scottish descent, such as the Carolinas?

Susan Stewart: We take into consideration several variables, one of which is the percentage of people who identify themselves as being of Scottish descent. However, what is perhaps more important is the amount of commercial trade and business links with Scotland in an individual state. For that reason, Houston in Texas and silicon valley in California will always be important, as will Massachusetts because of its universities' commercial research base.

Linkages that exist between Scottish institutions and those in individual states are important. For example, there is a linkage between the University of Edinburgh and Stanford University. Twin-town linkages are also important. For example, the lord provost of Dundee comes out to the old town of Alexandria, which is just across the river from me, every Christmas because the two places have a twinning relationship. Frankly, however, US politicians' individual enthusiasm for Scotland will have a large bearing on how fruitful such relationships will be.

Mr Raffan: The twinning of universities is obviously important. I was at the regions with legislative power meeting at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre this morning and another event was going on there involving the University of Cambridge and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. We are in a competitive field, so do you try to facilitate the twinning of Scottish universities with American ones? If not, do you regard that as a job for Scottish universities?

Susan Stewart: I assist our universities' efforts wherever possible. It is fair to say that all our universities have increased their profile, presence and activity in the States. They are enormously beneficial ambassadors for Scotland. We have a good story to tell about Scottish higher education. Perhaps that is why the number of US students studying in Scottish institutions has increased by 50 per cent over the past four years.

Traditionally, the Scottish universities were perhaps wary of coming together because they compete with one another for student numbers. However, there is a growing recognition among the individual universities that the Scottish higher education brand is so good that it benefits individual institutions. With that in mind, many of our Scottish universities are planning an event in

Boston in April around the time of tartan week to showcase research excellence. They chose Boston because of the number of higher education institutions there.

Mr Raffan: You have mentioned the Scottish international forum. There are several different organisations, such as Friends of Scotland and globalscot. Can you briefly talk about their relative roles and importance? I realise that you do not want to get into policy issues, but perhaps you can tell us how you work with them.

Susan Stewart: I work with all of them. Globalscot is part of the SDI network, which is a joint initiative of Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Executive. Globalscot is narrowly focused on economic development and business-to-business links, which is probably one of its strengths. Friends of Scotland was originally a Scotland Office initiative, but it is now under the Scottish Executive. It is aimed at a broader educational and cultural outreach to people who have an affinity with Scotland but who might not be interested in going to a seminar on biotech, for example.

Mr Raffan: Is it off the ground or at the end of the runway?

Susan Stewart: My understanding is that Friends of Scotland has been renamed Global Friends of Scotland. As I think that an answer to a parliamentary question that was lodged earlier this year said, it has been given a clear focus and has been expanded within target audiences to support initiatives such as fresh talent.

Mr Raffan: What about the role of the Scottish international forum?

Susan Stewart: That is an important body at home. The other organisations—globalscot and Global Friends of Scotland—are for people elsewhere in the world who are interested in Scotland.

Mr Raffan: There is a group of various people—I am not sure what it is called—that includes Kit Forbes and others, which is advising. Whom is it advising? Is it advising VisitScotland?

The Convener: That is globalscot.

Mr Raffan: It is very confusing.

Irene Oldfather: You have spoken a bit about your role in the embassy and your links with the international forum and the wider networks. How do you feed information back here to the Scottish Executive? What are your day-to-day relations with the external affairs division like? Where are you within that structure, and how frequently do you meet? What is the relationship like between you and ministers?

Susan Stewart: In the age-old practice of bureaucrats, I write papers and send them back to my civil service colleagues at home. This has been a learning curve for all of us. The challenges of management, time and geography mean that it has not always been easy. However, all of us in the Executive have learned from setting up this post. I am part of the international division that reports most directly to Mr McCabe. However, the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister—with his enterprise hat on and with responsibility for SDI—and Ms Ferguson clearly have an interest in the promotion of Scotland. Often, for specific proposals, a minute will go to ministers.

I am home for work purposes probably about three times a year. That is important. Out in the embassy, I am not in the SCOTS intranet system because of embassy security, so it can be easy to get out of touch with the nuances of how policy develops and the politics back home. It is important to come back here. It helps that I am a news junkie. The first thing that I do in the morning is get *The Herald*, *The Scotsman*, the BBC and the *Daily Record*.

Irene Oldfather: Are you involved in the external affairs team? Do you participate in team meetings? What do you do when you come over here?

Susan Stewart: I do not think that we have managed to have an away day that has coincided with my being back here. However, when I am home, I have regular meetings with my colleagues, my boss and my boss's boss. I also try to ensure that I use the time effectively to meet other players who have an interest in the promotion of Scotland. Tomorrow I will meet Roy Devon, who works for the Parliament.

Irene Oldfather: I am just trying to figure out how the agenda is being driven. You have spoken a lot about the initiatives that you have taken. You have expanded your role significantly and have quite a large remit. I am wondering how we link all this together and what the drivers are.

Susan Stewart: Through the civil service structures, in the division that is carrying out ministers' objectives in the framework that is set by the international strategy.

The Convener: I think that the point that Irene Oldfather is trying to get at relates to what Keith Raffan was saying about the nine points of the remit. Those nine points have varying degrees of specificity. The question is how we get from them to the programme of action that the Executive wants you to undertake on its behalf. Is the operation in the USA driven by ministers and their priorities or is it driven by a committed public servant who is doing a good job for us, which is how it appears to members of the committee? To

what extent are you setting your own direction and to what extent is your direction set by ministers?

Susan Stewart: The direction is set by ministers and is transmitted to me via the senior civil service. If I propose doing anything that involves expenditure, I write a minute that is read by ministers, who assess whether my proposal advances their international strategy for promoting Scotland.

The Convener: You talked about the flow of reports. Do you produce a periodic report?

Susan Stewart: I write a monthly letter to my line manager.

The Convener: Will that document be seen by ministers?

Susan Stewart: I am not sure. Ministers could see it if they wished.

The Convener: But you do not know whether they see it.

Susan Stewart: I do not know.

The Convener: Could those documents be discussed with the committee or are they sensitive?

Susan Stewart: They are not formal enough to be sensitive. They are almost like a letter from America setting out what I have been doing and how I have been spending taxpayers' money. I could put the information into more formal language.

I meet ministers when I am in Scotland—I had a meeting with Mr McCabe this morning.

Mr Raffan: After the last Cabinet reshuffle, I said to the Deputy First Minister that there now appeared to be seven ministers who had some interest in external relations. He told me, with a smile, that I was exaggerating and that it was only six. Still, there are rather a lot of ministers involved in this area, so you are probably quite glad that ministers' input is funnelled to you through the civil service. How many of those six do you meet when you come over on your three trips?

Susan Stewart: It varies. Jim Wallace was out just before the MSPs were out. The First Minister takes a keen interest, obviously.

Mr Raffan: As I say, responsibilities were spread out somewhat after the last reshuffle. Who would you say you are principally dealing with? Is it Mr McCabe or Ms Ferguson, or is the process still developing?

Susan Stewart: I deal with Mr McCabe and Ms Ferguson.

Mr Raffan: Do you see them as being the lead ministers in terms of external relations, apart from the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister?

Susan Stewart: For day-to-day strategic portfolio interests, Mr McCabe is the lead minister and for specific promotion of Scotland activities in support of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, Ms Ferguson is the lead minister.

Mr Raffan: You mentioned the newsletters that you send to your line manager. Could we see copies of them?

Susan Stewart: Yes. You should bear in mind that they are not professionally designed—I am considering putting that work out to a consultant.

Mr Raffan: I am not surprised, given everything else that you do.

The Convener: When we visited the USA, we saw different models of operation for the representation of the various parts of the UK in the USA. My colleagues visited the Welsh office in New York and we all visited the Northern Ireland bureau, which is in downtown Washington and which establishes its own identity by being separate from the embassy, unlike your operation, which is very much within the confines of the embassy. What are the practical ups and downs of those distinct arrangements?

15:00

Susan Stewart: Earlier, I alluded to advantages of being in the embassy. It is clear that Northern Ireland must find advantages in having a bureau outside the embassy, but it would be for Northern Ireland to speak about that matter. It is also worth pointing out that we are at different stages in our evolution and that Northern Ireland has been there for 14 years. Obviously, the matter can be debated. There are advantages from a Scotland House-type model and from being in the embassy, but we are probably in danger of discussing policy decisions that are better dealt with by the minister.

Mr Raffan: We also visited the Irish consulate in New York, where the consul has ambassador status. What are the relative resources for the Irish Republic in respect of the States as a whole? The Irish consulate is based in New York for obvious reasons—there is a large population of Irish descent there. Do you have any idea what the relative resources are of the Irish Republic and Scotland?

Susan Stewart: I do not know about the Irish Republic. The Northern Ireland bureau's budget is £800,000 and ours is £250,000, but I do not know what the Irish Republic's budget is.

Mr Raffan: It is probably considerably larger than £800,000. We should find out.

The Convener: Did you say that the Northern Ireland bureau's budget is £800,000 and that the Scottish Executive's budget is £250,000?

Susan Stewart: Yes.

The Convener: Does part of that £250,000 go on a facilities cost at the embassy?

Susan Stewart: Yes.

Irene Oldfather: Does the £800,000 that you mention include the economic development side? Do your figures include SDI money?

Susan Stewart: My figures do not include SDI money, which is an important point, as it has 23 staff and four offices in America. I do not think that the £800,000 for Northern Ireland includes money for Invest Northern Ireland, but it will include money for renting office space.

The Convener: In order to make a like-for-like comparison, we need to know whether the economic development agencies are in or out. Are the £800,000 and the £250,000 for broadly comparable areas of activity?

Susan Stewart: I do not want to mislead the committee, so you will have to check with the Northern Ireland bureau. My budget is £250,000, but the budget for tartan week and other promotional activities, for example, will be extra. The Northern Ireland bureau's activities around St Patrick's day might come out of the £800,000, in which case we would not be comparing like with like. I am not trying to be difficult—I am simply not sure what the Northern Ireland budget covers. You would be better to check with the bureau.

The Convener: The clerks can pursue that issue directly and make a comparison for members in due course.

The final issue that I want to discuss is future plans. We have talked a lot about history, what has been learned and what has been undertaken in the past three years. What is the current state of plans for the development of the presence in the United States over the next 12, 24 and 36 months?

Susan Stewart: The priority for the office is to form better links with political organisations such as the NCSL and the National Governors Association. I alluded to that matter earlier. Through those links, we want to build expertise in policy exchange between Scotland and the United States. We want to establish the website. The international image project is increasingly important, as is the fresh talent initiative, following the First Minister's new Scots speech earlier this year. The United States office probably offers sustainability. As there is an office, follow-up work can be done after a promotional week. That is the key to the office. I hope that there will be a degree

of credibility and stability. If you are asking about resources, they will be for others to determine.

The Convener: I assume that the activity programme or the operational programme of our presence in the United States is focused on the implementation of the Government's international strategy and is set in that context.

Susan Stewart: Yes.

Mr Raffan: You are the first of your kind. The First Minister is to appoint an equivalent in Beijing, so you might be described as a pilot project.

Susan Stewart: Perhaps.

Mr Raffan: I wonder to what extent Executive officials and ministers have said, "You were the first. How should we do it again?" I ask you not to go into policy but to talk about your practical experience of what you have had to do in a big country. China is a big country, too. How might a similar office to yours operate there? Has the Executive learned from your good and bad experiences?

Susan Stewart: I hope that it has.

Mr Raffan: Has it asked you about that?

Susan Stewart: Yes. Colleagues have asked me about specifics. The learning curve has been steep for all of us. My learning curve has been perpendicular. As they establish the China office, senior managers will apply some of the lessons that they have learned from managing me—or trying to manage me.

The Convener: How does such a proposal work its way through the system? Does an occasional phone call come from the Scottish Executive in which someone says, "We're doing this China thing. What do you think about this or that?" Do you have more formal input into development of proposals? I do not know whether a working group is developing them; we are not clear about where the First Minister is going.

Susan Stewart: My involvement has been informal.

The Convener: I think that fresh talent has broad support from committee members, although I am not sure where the Conservatives stand on it—

Mr Raffan: They need some.

The Convener: Yes. The initiative has broad support across the political spectrum in the committee and in Parliament and is a major plank of the Government's international policy. Do you monitor issues that may arise from Bush Administration decisions and may have an impact on the fresh talent initiative, or is the range of such

issues left for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to interpret?

I want to have an idea of the channel of dialogue about such matters. Does a message come through the British embassy to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which makes the Scottish Executive aware that something that will not help the fresh talent initiative is coming? Do you say, "First Minister, you should be aware that X is happening and will not be good for us"?

Susan Stewart: Primarily the former situation prevails. Political reporting would come from the embassy whether or not I was in Washington. That information goes to London and from there up to Edinburgh.

The Convener: For policy issues in general, we continue to depend on awareness in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that it must think about reflecting the fact that the United Kingdom has different Administrations.

Susan Stewart: Yes.

The Convener: I thank Susan Stewart for attending and for her assistance with our inquiry.

I have no further items of business. Members have been notified that I have taken the liberty of inviting Mr Neil Kinnock—or should I say Lord Kinnock?—to lead a seminar on his reflections on his time in office as a European commissioner at 11 o'clock in the morning on Thursday 9 December. Members are invited to that seminar, which is part of the committee's programme.

Meeting closed at 15:08.

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