

Rt. Hon. Robert Halfon MP

Member of Parliament for Harlow and the Villages



House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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His Excellency the Ambassador of the United States
Robert Wood Johnson
Embassy of the United States of America
33 Nine Elms Lane
London
SW11 7US

8 June 2020

Dear Your Excellency,

For a long time, I have held great respect for the United States. I, like millions of people across the world, use American tech products, watch American films, consume American drinks and listen regularly to Bob Dylan. My engagement with the United States goes beyond the consumption of American products; I also have a deep interest in the historical and political development of your nation. Throughout my studies at university, I focused on American politics and my thesis was on Ronald Reagan - someone who I hold enormous respect for. I am also an admirer of former President Kennedy and everything he represented and even have a framed picture of him on the wall of my office in the House of Commons.

However, it seems astonishing that a country which put man on the moon and has perhaps two of the most important symbols of enlightenment - the Abraham Lincoln memorial and the Statue of Liberty - still experiences shocking outbursts of naked racial prejudice. The despicable and tragic murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 is a testament to this long-standing issue. After years of civil rights advancements, it seems incredible that, time after time, there are still horrific incidents of violence against America's black and minority ethnic communities. Of course, I oppose any unlawful action or violence by anyone, whatever their background.

It fills me with great concern to have received numerous emails from members of my constituency of Harlow, Essex, condemning American actions. Young people write with genuine dismay at the murder of George Floyd and the continued racial prejudice in the United States. For the younger generations of this country, the image of America that they hold is not of a nation that is the land of the free, but the land of discrimination. They perceive the American dream to be nothing but an illusion for them.

I, therefore, want to take the time to quote to you a few remarks from my Harlow residents.

One constituent describes the current state of affairs in America as

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“deplorable”

and emphasises that the black community

“are being slaughtered, demeaned, and harassed simply because of the colour of their skin”.

Another resident stresses that American

“protesters have faced severe repression and violence standing up to the repeat killing of black Americans”.

Given the intensity of these sentiments, Harlow residents, who have no political axe to grind, I would like to understand what the Government of the United States is doing to counter racial prejudice and what they perceive as institutionalised disadvantage, disenfranchisement and discrimination felt by black people in America. Specifically, they would be grateful to learn what steps are being taken to ensure that recent actions by members of the American police force do not happen again.

America’s position and importance on the world stage means that this issue matters not only to black people within the United States, but also for individuals and communities across the world. I hope your leaders will not only offer leadership within America, but also internationally, as many nations look to the US for guidance on the values that the founders of the United States constitution held dear.

It is important to state that the UK has it’s own problems with racial discrimination. As such, I have also written to the Prime Minister to demand action, rather than inaction, and combat the problems that exist within my own country.

In my introductory paragraph I mentioned Bob Dylan; I believe one of his most powerful songs to be ‘The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll’. As you know this song is about the murder of a black employee and how her murderer escaped full force of the law in 1963. It is an extremely moving piece of work and leads me to question, why is it that, in 2020, there is yet another Hattie Carroll, in the murder of George Floyd?

I would also like to take this opportunity to extend an invitation for you to come and visit Harlow, once the COVID-19 crisis has passed, to speak to young people about these issues and what is being done to eliminate prejudice. I would ask an educational institute in my constituency to host the event and you would be made very welcome.

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With every best wish,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Robert Halfon".

Robert Halfon MP