

Cross Party Group on the USA

Tuesday 14th January 6:00 – 7:30 pm

What now for US politics?

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Daniel Johnson MSP
Michelle Thomson MSP
Douglas Ross MSP
Liam Kerr MSP
Pam Gosal MSP
Sharon Dowey MSP

Invited Guests

Kathryn Porter
Dong-Thu Caohuu
Frank Cogliano

Non-MSP Group Members

Alan Johnston
Alastair Ross
Allan Hogarth
Beth Wilkinson
Clare Reid
Graham Cameron
Kevin Havelock
Murray Collins
Nora Rothrock
Olivia McLaren
Patrick Colquhoun
Peter Hourston
Peter Mowforth
Richard Muir
Roger Fenske
Scott Johnstone
Scott McQuarrie

Apologies

Andy Patton
Angus Johnstone
Daniel Shorr
Ian Houston
Jacqui Watt
James Macsween
Lynn Harris
Kenneth Good
Kenneth Shand
Laurence Heron
Marion MacCormick
Ros-Wardley Smith
Sandy Begbie
Steve Kerr
William Sleigh

1. Welcome and Introductions

Daniel Johnson MSP (DJ MSP) opens the meeting and welcomes the group members. DJ MSP moves forward to reconstitute the CPG on the USA.

2. AGM - Election of convenor and vice-convenors, approval of previous minutes

The group has nominated and elected DJ MSP to continue as convenor of the CPG on the USA, along with Michelle Thomson MSP (MT MSP) and Douglas Ross MSP (DR MSP) as co-convenors. Emma Harper MSP (not present) may be re-elected as a co-convenor at a later date.

Group members agree that the University of Edinburgh will be the new secretariat for the CPG.

Group members approve the minutes of last meeting.

DJ MSP hands over to Kathryn Porter (KP) Consul General of the U.S. Consulate in Edinburgh.

3. Updates from the U.S. Consulate General, Consul General Kathryn Porter

KP, accompanied by foreign officer Dong-Thu Caohuu (DTC), gives an introduction of herself and a reflection of her first six months in the role. She outlines three major lines of consulate effort: services for U.S. citizens, tourism and culture, and economy (trade, energy, and financial services).

KP updates the group that President-Elect Donald Trump will be inaugurated on 20 January 2025 and a presidential transition of power is ongoing, including hearings for

cabinet nominees. KP and staff cannot speculate on policy proposals, as Trump is not yet in office and policies are not yet official.

Q&A

Q1: DR MSP asks about the effects of potential tariffs on goods exported to the U.S.

A1: KP says she cannot speculate on how the tariffs will affect trade, but acknowledges it is a hot topic. The U.S. Consulate has a close relationship with the Scottish Whisky Association and other industry partners who are closely following how tariffs may affect trade.

4. Prof. Frank Cogliano – What to expect in the second Trump administration

DJ MSP introduces Professor Frank Cogliano (FC), Dean for North America and professor of American history at the University of Edinburgh, to give his thoughts on the incoming Trump administration.

FC outlines the November 2024 election, stating it was not a landslide election despite Trump winning both the popular and electoral college. Republicans now have the Senate majority and a slim majority in the House of Representatives. State election results show that differences in Republican and Democratic state legislature control are slimmer now than in 2017. The U.S. Constitution bars presidents from running for a third term, and the 2028 succession struggle is likely to start shortly.

On domestic policy, FC speculates that there will be a crackdown on immigration, including deportations of people who are in the U.S. illegally. There will likely be tariffs, either globally or targeted at certain countries. Trump will likely want to punish his “enemies” or opponents, including in the Justice Department.

On foreign policy, FC says the world is in a more “perilous” position now than in 2017. Trump is likely to confront the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. Relations between the U.S. and China, Russia, and its NATO allies will be at the top of the agenda. Tariffs are also applicable in foreign policy. In recent headlines, Trump has spoken about wanting to take over Greenland, Panama, and Canada, prompting questions about whether he is serious or “trolling”. FC says Trump’s rhetoric could undermine the U.S.’s position as a world leader.

5. Questions and Discussion

Q1: MT MSP asks how Elon Musk fits into the Trump administration.

A1: FC answers that Musk is a wildcard that has emerged in the past month. There seems to be tension among the Trump coalition between so-called “tech bros” and MAGA (Make America Great Again) rank and file, especially regarding visas for skilled workers. FC speculates that Trump and Musk’s relationship may deteriorate.

Q2: Clare Reid (CR), Prosper, asks if there are other coalitions that are seeking influence and how that could affect trade relations.

A2: FC answers that Trump has inherited a strong economy and Wall Street could be seeking tax cuts. But tariffs and tax cuts could affect the health of the economy.

C (Comment) 1: Allan Hogarth (AH), Scottish North American Business Council, comments that he does not think Trump would want to sour relations with Scotland due to business ventures and his mother's origins.

R (Response) 1: FC does not think Trump would target Scotland with tariffs. However, FC notes that Trump has recently antagonised Canada — a close U.S. ally — so Trump's decisions could be unpredictable.

C2: DTC responds to CR's question about coalition and constituency interests, saying there is interest around domestic energy, especially clean energy and renewables. The consulate cannot comment on the direction of the Inflation Reduction Act, but expects some sort of review of the act. However, there has been private investment made in various states, and that could be a strong constituency industry group to engage with.

Q3: Kevin Havelock (KH), Royal Bank of Scotland asks what will happen to overseas investment if Trump is more isolationist and protectionist and does not care about what happens overseas.

A3: KP says this is a better question for FC, but mentions that both parties could be affected by certain policies. FC says Trump is vocal about isolationism, especially with wars. However, Trump believes in international business with his business background. FC believes there will be continued U.S. engagement with regard to trade and business.

C3: Scott Johnstone (SJ), Scottish Life Sciences, comments that life sciences funding is stagnant in the U.S.

C4: Pete Mowforth (PM), INDEZ, comments that small businesses and exporters, particularly e-commerce companies, will suffer with tariffs if de minimis policies are changed.

R4: DJ MSP compares this to the impact of Brexit on small exporters.

Q4: Alistair Ross (AR), Association of British Insurers, asks how Scotland can build on Trump's liking of Scotland, golf, and his familial connection to Scotland.

A4: FC says that this is a better question for KP, but mentions that Americans like Scotland and the Tartan Day parade is very important for Scotland's brand in the U.S. KP answers that Scotland and the U.S. have long-term people-to-people ties, especially with tracing Scottish ancestry and tourism. There are also strong state and city ties to Scotland.

C5: DJ MSP comments that there are thousands of U.S. graduates of Scottish universities who return to the U.S. every year and wonders if Scotland is using that to maximum benefit.

C6: AH comments that there will be an event on energy and resilience as part of Scotland Week in New York.

C7: SJ comments that he thinks it is good that John Swinney is open to meeting with Trump and the CPG should meet with Trump, if given the opportunity.

C8: Richard Muir (RM), Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, comments that the Chamber is hoping to take a delegation to Tartan Week this year to build on global Scots and Glaswegians network.

C9: MT MSP says she and Alexander Stewart MSP will be attending Tartan Week to represent the Scottish Parliament.

Q5: DR MSP asks how the Jack Smith report has been viewed in the U.S.; how the House's slim majority will affect Speaker Mike Johnson's speakership; and what kind of vice president JD Vance is and if he's a possible successor to Trump.

A5: FC thinks Vance would be the presumptive nominee, but Trump has a history of not getting along with his vice presidents (referring to Mike Pence). Trump is not young and could die in office. Vance's record as politician too brief to speculate too much. On the House and Mike Johnson, FC says the Republican caucus is fractured and could turn on Johnson, but Johnson is secure for now with Trump's support. FC is unsure if he could stay speaker until midterms based on the fracture. On how the Jack Smith report was received, FC says it's too early to tell, but those who do not like Trump agree with the findings and those who do like Trump believe he is being persecuted by the Justice Department. FC also notes that relationship between the Trump administration and the Justice Department, especially the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), will be important because Trump has animus toward the Justice Department.

Q6: Nora Rothrock (NR), Scottish North American Business Council, asks what kinds of regulatory or deregulatory actions may come and affect international business and trade, and how the deregulation of media can also have an impact on doing business with the U.S.

A6: FC prefaces that he is not an expert in this topic. It's possible that there will be a desire to deregulate as an ideological commitment. FC speculates there may be more regulation in the tech sector in European Union tech as the U.S. deregulates more.

Q7: DJ MSP asks if we should be thinking about geopolitical risk and security as much as the economic issues.

A7: FC says yes, and the impact on global security and order is worrying if allies cannot rely on the U.S.

6. Finish

DJ MSP thanks group members, provides final remarks with next meeting dates, and closes the meeting.