

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for granting this important adjournment debate today.

RAF Croughton, based in my constituency of South Northamptonshire, was built in 1938 and is home to a United States Air Force communications station.

For many decades, RAF Croughton's strong links to our local community have been clear. They have regularly held community events and many children of base employees attend local schools. American citizens working at the base have become neighbours and friends of my constituents.

In 2015, I was made aware of a US plan to consolidate some of their UK military and communications operations. RAF Croughton was earmarked for expansion, and the then Secretary of State for Defence wrote to me on 8th January 2015, saying (and I quote):

*"...approximately 1300 of the 1900 US Service personnel leaving RAF Alconbury and RAF Molesworth are expected to transfer to Croughton with **all the benefits** to the local economy at Croughton this should bring."*

As the local MP, I was given a helpful tour of RAF Croughton and its plans to build new facilities including housing, a school and a new health centre for their staff. I was pleased to support their proposals, and their need for temporary direct access for HGVs from the A43 - a fast moving dual carriageway that runs through my constituency.

But four years on, Madam Deputy Speaker, before any of those plans got underway, on August 27, 2019, my 19 year old constituent Harry Dunn tragically died, when a car driven by an American citizen from the base hit his motorbike head on because she was unintentionally driving on the wrong side of the road. A few weeks later, she returned to the USA claiming diplomatic immunity. She has since been charged by the Crown Prosecution Service, and our Home Office has made a request to the US for her extradition to face charges and provide some closure to Harry's family. This has been denied.

Harry's Mother, Charlotte, Father, Tim, and their whole family and local network of friends remain in shock and are devastated by their loss.

As Charlotte has said: *"Then on 27th August 2019 I got the worst possible news any parent could get, that no parent should ever receive. I lost my gorgeous 19-year-old son Harry. He was doing what he loved best, riding his motorcycle. As he was approaching RAF Croughton, about 3 miles from where we live, riding perfectly safely, he*

was struck by a car being driven on the wrong side of the road.

He died an unimaginably slow, painful, agonising and distressing death, having landed on the verge by the side of the road and broken just about every bone in his body. By the time I got to hospital it was too late. He had already passed and I didn't get to say goodbye to him or to comfort him. That will tear me apart for the rest of my life. I did however promise him that I would get him justice and as his mother I will not let him down.

I know there is nothing I can do to turn the clock back. I won't see his happy face again walking through the door, get a hug or a text.

Harry was a wonderful young man with all of his life ahead of him."

The fact is, Madam Deputy Speaker, that if you or I unintentionally killed someone by driving on the wrong side of the road, we would face the UK judicial system - one of the best in the world, designed to deliver justice to victims and fairness to perpetrators.

At a recent meeting with senior representatives of RAF Croughton and the US Embassy, they made clear to me their deep sense of sympathy and sorrow for Harry's family and friends. Nevertheless, we are just not making any progress in achieving justice and closure for Harry - it is now

six months from the day my Right Honourable Friend, the Home Secretary put in the request for extradition and almost a year that Harry's family and friends have been trying to deal with their unimaginable loss.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, turning now to the point of my adjournment debate - and may I thank you, on behalf of Harry's family, for permitting this debate – there have recently been planning applications submitted on behalf of RAF Croughton to South Northamptonshire Council to presumably begin the work on their expansion.

And speaking frankly, it is unthinkable under the circumstances that any planning applications can be treated as business as usual between two long standing allies. Many constituents, other people right across the country and even from the United States itself have written to me to say, "So if I, or a member of my family, is driving or walking near the base, and an American citizen harms or kills us, that person can simply go back to the US and there's nothing the UK can do about it, even though the USA is our greatest ally and one half of a special relationship?" It is utterly intolerable.

I have discussed this issue with the Leader of South Northamptonshire Council, who has taken every possible step to ensure improvements to signage and road markings near the base, in order to prevent any other

tragedy in the future. He quite rightly points out that the local council is only permitted to take a planning decision based on planning law. However, he has also pointed out to me that where the powers of a local planning authority are limited, the Secretary of State is able to call in any applications under the rules that are permitted on applications that, and I quote:

“could have significant effects beyond their immediate locality;

give rise to substantial regional or national controversy;

or that may involve the interests of national security or of foreign Governments.”

In my view, and in that of many residents of South Northamptonshire, it is essential that the Secretary of State calls in any planning applications that could leave my constituents vulnerable to future tragedies.

When Harry’s parents Charlotte and Tim came to see me with their partners, Bruce and Tracey for the first time in October 2019, it was an emotional meeting, and I assured them that I would do everything possible to try and achieve justice for Harry and to ensure that the tragedy that has happened to their family will not happen to another.

Since then, I have worked with my Right Honourable Friends the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Attorney General, the Health Secretary and the Transport Secretary as well as the Crown Prosecution Service, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire, the US Embassy and the base Commander at RAF Croughton. At every one of those meetings the focus has been on achieving justice for Harry and making sure that this tragedy is never repeated.

And yet, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm sorry to say that in spite of all the local efforts to improve road signage, the efforts at the base to improve driver training, the efforts of Northamptonshire Police to enforce and follow up all incidents in recent months we continue to see near misses - just this week two young men recorded a car travelling towards them on their side of the road just near the base. Who knows if this was another American citizen forgetting to drive on the left? But isn't it terrible that so many of my constituents are now fearful of the base?

I know that my colleagues in Government share my desire for justice to be done and to prevent any repeat of this terrible tragedy. It seems to me that for any potential expansion or changes to be agreed at RAF Croughton, we need our greatest allies, the United States of America, to demonstrate their empathy for this devastated family by allowing justice to be done for Harry. RAF Croughton is a key part of the 501st Combat

Support Wing whose vision includes the phrase - '*Focused on Strong Communities Where Families Thrive*'.

However, Madam Deputy Speaker, if they do not live their vision, how can they expect the residents of Brackley, Croughton and the surrounding villages to support the prospect of hundreds more US citizens moving to the base?

So, in concluding Madam Deputy Speaker, I have three requests of the Government. First, is to make very clear to the US Government that they, as our key ally should not be denying justice to Harry's family.

And secondly, any expansions should not take place whilst this issue is not resolved.

And thirdly, if the base is not looking to expand, we should still not be helping them to change anything whilst this matter is still outstanding. But what does need to happen is moving the base's access point off the A43, ensuring that RAF Croughton's personnel drive on the correct side of the road to prevent tragedies like the death of Harry Dunn from ever happening again.

Thank you.