



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Miss Hayley Jayne Wilkinson
President
University of Lincoln Students' Union
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KM/MB

04 November 2015

Dear Miss Wilkinson,

It was with surprise that I received your letter regarding the 'Tampon Tax' which included text that you had issued to the Lincoln media and circa 13 000 students in Lincoln. In response please be aware that I am issuing this reply to the media and I fully expect you to take the time to email it – in its entirety - to the students (who are my constituents) that you chose to send your misleading initial letter to last week.

Firstly, and importantly, I support calls for the United Kingdom to be able to apply a zero rate of VAT to female sanitary products. It is for this reason that, as was reported publicly in the national press on 24 and 25 October, and subsequently, that I joined seven other Conservative Members of Parliament in initially signing an amendment to the Finance Bill tabled by a Labour Member of Parliament, Paula Sherriff MP. If passed however, the Amendment would have only forced the Government to undertake a three month negotiation exercise with no likelihood of a positive outcome.

As a result of my initially signing the Amendment, I received prompt assurances from Government Ministers and the Government Whips' Office, after various conversations, that we would, as part of the upcoming renegotiations, negotiate with the European Union a VAT exemption on women's sanitary products.

The pressure I and other MPs had brought to bear on Ministers had 'paid off' which is why on the Monday morning I asked the House of Commons' Public Bills Office to remove my name from the Amendment. Indeed, as we are currently negotiating the UK's EU membership rules - something I welcome and have long fought for - it makes sense for the Government to fold this issue into discussions about powers which the Government are seeking to take back from EU control.

In essence, the vote in the House of Commons on this issue was divided between those who wanted to tie the Government to a three month negotiation exercise and those who wanted to give flexibility to the Government to negotiate as part of the EU renegotiation strategy. Both sides supported the need to reduce the VAT rate on sanitary products to zero. It would be correct to say that all MPs, whether they voted for or against, were favouring VAT rates being reduced to zero on sanitary products but the votes divided on differing ways to achieve it.

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Your claims, therefore, that "...on Monday 26 October I voted against a proposal to abolish the 5% levy placed on women's sanitary products"; "...view female sanitary products as a luxury item..."; and "...agree that women should have to pay a 5% tax on these essential items..." are all wholly untrue and completely unfounded. Contrary to what you reported both to the University's students and local media therefore, I obviously voted for the Government's proposal to seek the consent of the 28 European Union member countries to enable the reduction of VAT from 5% to zero.

Further, although it did not fit your politically motivated narrative, nor that of the ill-informed local media, I actually took some positive steps to achieve the desired result. I maybe just male and Conservative in your distorted view but like other colleagues we have Grandmothers, Mothers, daughters, sisters, sisters-in-law, aunties, cousins and nieces along with around half of our constituents who are also female and whom, along with all other constituents, we represent at all times to the best of our ability.

I understand that you are new to your role, although you were involved in various ill-fated campaigns with the SU in the past, and despite this when we recently met I repeated that I want to help you, the University and students in any way I can. But you do no justice to yourself, nor the 13,000 Lincoln University students you dubiously claim to represent, by sending baseless letters via the press that make unsubstantiated claims to, and about, your local Member of Parliament.

So in this age of 'dog whistle politics', which you so aptly demonstrated that you are a willing participant in, it is pretty conclusively demonstrated that you are barking up the wrong tree by attacking me for something I have not done, when in truthfulness you should have welcomed my actions and commended my stance. Your actions do you no credit.

I trust you will learn from this experience and pay more attention to the facts in the future. I would have hoped someone who professes to have graduated from such an established and well-regarded University as the University of Lincoln would know the value of some diligent research.

Of course I also now look forward to you and your supporters joining the EU renegotiation campaign as this subject incites so much passion, and of course if the EU fails to allow the renegotiation of our VAT raising powers, then Vote Leave would, I suggest, be your natural home as we approach the upcoming referendum.

Yours sincerely,
