

David OHara

From: Tom Murray <tom@murraypharmacies.ie>
Sent: Monday 30 November 2020 21:06
To: David OHara; Enterprise Trade and Employment
Subject: FW: oireachtas joint committee on enterprise trade an employment

Hi David, please find below my opening statements for the joint committee on enterprise trade and employment, it possibly runs a little over 5 minutes and i would appreciate a minutes grace if possible as there are 3 areas to cover.

Maidín mhaith agus go raibh maith agaibh as an deis seo le labhairt libhse fá choinne tionchar an breaitimeachta ar an pobal agus lucht gnó thart ar an teorainn. Is mise Tom Ó Muireadhaigh, potigéir agus liom inniu atá JJ O'Hara as contae liatroime de. Fearr gnó san earnáil turasóireachta.

As pharmacist with a small chain i employ 19 people, JJ is his various businesses in tourism and IT employees many more across both sides of the border.

I will present our opening comments and we will both be happy to take questions from that point on. Border Communities Against Brexit was formed approximately four years ago as we recognised the threat of brexit to the economic and social wellbeing of the communities on both sides of the border. As representatives of civic society we have lobbied and highlighted the many issues which concern us about brexit in the EU, Dublin, London and the USA, having had several meetings with Michél Barnier, Guy Verhofstadt, Nancy Pelosi amongst many others.

I will start with employees then move on to communities and then on to business. obviously some points apply to al 3 areas and to save time i won't duplicate them.

there is little evidence of employee readiness for brexit, this is for a number of reasons:

1. There is a lack of clarity and an inconsistency in information with respect to brexit. Brexit has already happened, britain left the EU, the transition period now ends on 31st December this year and there is no tangible difference so far and less understanding of what will happen in January. There have also been many many important deadlines after which there has thus far been no real change at employee level. This in itself has led to a level of complacency and disinterest, or a level of dicsonnect between employees and brexit. There is a strongly held belief that there will either be a deal or that all issues relating to brexit will be sorted out at a level above employee, either by business management or government level.
2. There is a serious insufficiency in information or detail about the implications of brexit in terms of supply routes, importation, exportation and associated paperwork and bureaucracy. This obviously comes from the lack of clarity at EU and british govenrment level as to what form of deal may take place, if a deal is completed successfully or what no deal means in reality at a day to day level within business. There is an expectation of extra paperwork, possible shortages in supplies but little is clear. Furthermore there is serious evidence of a lack of common understanding of the North of Ireland Protocol as already agreed. British government action in respect to breech of the international agreement has led to a level of further disengagement and mistrust. It has further caused a sense within employees that there is a complete lack of clarity around administrative details post brexit. This will need urgent attention and there will need to be business supports to provide the necessary training once it becomes clear as to the administrative requirements post brexit. This will need to be both financial and knowledge training based supports
3. Consistently we hear about the economic consequences of brexit, this has been coupled this year with the consequences of the pandemic. The potential financial impact of brexit, with or without a deal, has been lost by the hardships experienced due to the pandemic. The damage to job security caused by the pandemic has largely outweighed the potential impact on job security of brexit. It is imperative that the financial impact of brexit at a macro and micro level be made clear to employees in the short time frame between now and january 2021 as they need the ability to financially plan for any potential consequences. It is incumbent on business and government to prepare employees at all levels for the potential of job lossess and job security being damaged due to the negative impact of brexit on the economy.

In terms of community preparedness, this i believe to be totally absent.

1. The level of integration across the border of families, communities, sports teams, schools and community groups has been largely misunderstood and underestimated until of late.
2. There is a widespread expectation that the free movement of people will continue and as such much of that integration will continue seamlessly.
3. However there is a genuine fear that the british government has the potential to renege on agreements around free movement as enshrined in the GFA. Their actions on the north of Ireland protocol has seriously undermined trust.
4. There is also a fear due to lack of knowledge about cross border funding and peace funding for border area commnunity initiatives. Again the lack of clarity and constant moving of goal posts and deadlines has added to this lack of understanding and lack of engagement.
5. Community groups and individuals living near the border need clarity and information. We have a very short time period left to understand and adapt to a huge change in our normal community living practice.

In terms of business:

- 1There are various possible outcomes and each of these outcomes will require different planning from the business community. The business community is under huge pressure due to the uncertainty surrounding brexit and the current pandemic.
2. The business community expected to see funding supports rolled out, and while we accept that the pandemic has affected growth and funding it is frustrating to see restrictions and lack of funding available under SBCI. The partner financial institutions telling businesses there is no funding left.
3. There is an urgent need for more funding in border regions. Original expectations were that around €400million would be invested in border regions but at present we have only seen around €15million delivered under BEDF. The border regions suffered massive financial hardships and lack of growth due to the presence of the border and to revitalise sustainable communities in the area we need uregent support financially and with infrastructure to guarantee the viability of businesses, employment and therefore communities.
4. There is anecdotal evidence of youth unemployment in the under 25s at levels of 40-50%, This is simply unsustainable for any community and we need urgent investment and initiatives in youth unemployment. The border counties of Donegal, Sligo Leitrim are tourists areas and have seen the decimation of tourism by the border and subsequently the growth achieved during the peace process years has been wiped out by covid. With investment in a new brand of tourism and other business intiatives we can reverse the trend in youth employment, retain young people in our communities and guarantee their future.
5. The threat of internal market bill is that goods produced in britain must be available on the market in north of Ireland, this potentially includes chlorinated chicken, GM foods and other goods which are not acceptable to the european single market. The risk of these goods penetrating the EU will require that a customs border be established in Ireland, which will be totally unacceptable to border communities or that Ireland as a whole will becomed somewhat annexed from the EU single market. This needs to be urgently addressed with the british government and we need to see the internal markets bill rescinded.

Thank you for your time and JJ and myself wil be happy to take any questions you may have.

regards

tom murray