

3 line whips and loyalties

I rarely vote against 3 line whips imposed by the Conservative party. Indeed, I have voted with Mrs May and the 3 line whips she has imposed on every occasion so far this Parliament. We have had many votes to win against a group of Conservative MPs seeking to defeat the government over every step it takes to implement the Manifesto pledge to leave the EU. We have won most of them and passed the EU Withdrawal Act as a result.

I am conscious that I was elected as an official Conservative candidate. My electors would normally expect me to vote with the Conservative government a majority of the voters in Wokingham voted for. As an MP I always try to ensure I vote for the interests of my constituents first, for the interests of the nation second and for the party I represent third. I also seek to make sure I vote to keep the promises I made at the last General Election, and where possible to keep the promises my party made. This means that I would only vote against a three line whip in a few circumstances.

1. Where the nationally agreed policy proposed by the Conservatives has a damaging side effect on Wokingham which means I need to put Wokingham's interest before the national and party interest. So if for example a generally approved piece of infrastructure meant the construction of an inappropriate neighbouring investment in my crowded area, I would be the voice of opposition to that particular project.
2. Where the government I usually support asks me to vote for a policy or law which violates or reverses pledges made in the Election Manifesto. Mr Cameron, for example, promised in the 2010 and 2015 Manifesto not to transfer more power to the EU, yet in government regularly did. I needed to oppose that breach of promise.
3. Where I have made an express pledge in the election that was different to the national party Manifesto. In 2017, for example, I expressed disagreement with the national Manifesto approach of making people pay more for care for the elderly. Mrs May herself then fortunately changed the pledge.

On Tuesday I may be asked to vote for the Withdrawal Agreement negotiated by the Prime Minister. I say may, as last time the government wisely withdrew the proposal when they saw they would lose by a large margin. I also say may, because if a rebel or opposition amendment was carried to the government's original proposal then Parliament will only vote on the motion as amended. I will vote with the government and in agreement with the three line whip to vote down all Opposition and rebel amendments to the motion, and would vote with the government to vote down the motion as amended should that circumstance arise.

If, as Mr Corbyn hopes, the unamended proposal is put to the Commons, I will vote against. I will do so primarily because it breaks the Manifesto pledge of the national party, and my own personal pledge to my voters that I will do my best to see through Brexit. It also breaks the national Manifesto promise to negotiate the Withdrawal Agreement in parallel with negotiating the Future Partnership Agreement, for the obvious sensible reason that compromises

offered on the one could then have levered gains on the other. The Withdrawal Agreement seeks to undermine the UK bargaining position and lock us into many more months of effective EU membership and uncertainty about the future relationship.

My decision to vote against is reinforced by the weight of opinion in my constituency and in the wider nation according to opinion polls. A majority of those talking or writing to me want me to vote it down. The national polls show much stronger support for leaving than for accepting the 21-45 month delay and further uncertainties of the Mrs May Agreement.

In the end each MP has to exercise his or her judgement. My judgement is that this is wrong. My main reason to vote against is the Agreement violates Manifesto pledges made to secure election, and fails to implement the wishes of voters as determined in the People's Vote. Latest polls endorse the view that this is neither a good deal, nor a popular one.