

My Interventions in the Draft Postal Packets (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2023 (2)

The form of this statutory instrument is to amend regulations relating to foreign postal packets. It includes GB-NI postal packets alongside foreign postal packets in important matters in the regulations specified. How can the Government defend that? They are effectively treating Northern Ireland and GB as foreign countries to each other, accepting a form of regulation designed for a true international border and clearly violating the terms of the internal market legislation governing the United Kingdom? *[Interruption.]*

Victoria Atkins, Financial Secretary to the Treasury

If I may, I will address that point, and then I promise I will come to the hon. Member for North Antrim in due course. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham used that language, so that I can make it clear for the purposes of *Hansard* that this is not about trying to differentiate or draw lines around our precious Union.

My Interventions in the Draft Postal Packets (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2023 (3)

John Redwood:

I thought that, in law, and certainly politically, the Good Friday agreement took precedence over other agreements, given its importance. How is this measure in any way compatible with the Good Friday agreement when it does not have the consent of the Unionist community—an important underlying principle of the whole agreement? I would also like to assure the Minister that I do not use the phrase “hard compromise”, and I have not been recommending these kinds of proposals.

Victoria Atkins, Financial Secretary to the Treasury:

I am sorry; I did not catch my right hon. Friend’s last point. Would he repeat it?

I thought the Minister implied earlier that I thought that this was a hard compromise. I do not; I think it is bad policy.

Victoria Atkins, Financial Secretary to the Treasury:

I think my right hon. Friend misheard me. I was referring to the Northern Ireland Minister, the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker). I would not dream of putting words in the mouth of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham.

A point was made about the Road Haulage Association. The answer to that intervention is that the powers were available to Border Force in respect of international movements. We understand the sensitivities and the concerns raised about making powers available for GB to NI movements, but we would say that that is not the same as making these international movements.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham asked a very important question about the Good Friday agreement. We do not accept that this is contrary to the Good Friday agreement. These regulations are in fact an enabler to the agreement that we have negotiated. As I said, we have ensured that consumer interests in Northern Ireland and the interests of British businesses selling to Northern Ireland are protected, but that means that an incentive now exists to move goods into Northern Ireland and take them across the Irish border to avoid EU tariffs. If we are to manage that risk—*[Interruption.]*

[My Interventions in the Draft Postal Packages \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2023 \(4\)](#)

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that there has already been diversion of trade away from GB into Northern Ireland, and is he worried that the draft regulations will create a lot more diversion of trade away from GB?

The right hon. Gentleman is quite right: that is the problem. In the absence of detailed knowledge about what the new arrangements will be, businesses will simply turn their back on Northern Ireland. I spoke to a constituent today who wanted to buy a mattress from Argos. Although Argos clearly brings goods into Northern Ireland, that was obviously inconvenient for it and it simply said, “We don’t sell mattresses to Northern Ireland any longer.” That is exactly what is happening. Even if the Minister is correct, the threat that there will be different arrangements for taking goods and postal packages into Northern Ireland will discourage businesses from entering into those kinds of arrangements. We are already seeing the diversion of trade.

The Government’s argument is that the draft regulations improve the situation, but actually, they do not. If we had stopped even with the provisions of the protocol, the grace periods would have prevented this from happening. It does not happen at present. If the Government really want there to be no interference, why not stick with the grace periods? Why not make it clear that the regulations are not needed? There has been no leakage during the grace periods, and there is no evidence that hazardous goods and so on are moving into the EU. Why did the Government not take that stance? Why are the Government still not taking that stance? There would then be no need for the regulations.

More money for local schools

The government has today published the figures for increased money for schools in 2024-5 by constituency under the National Funding Formula. The local Education Authority decides the final allocations by school.

Wokingham sees an increase of 7.2%, one of the larger increases, to a total of £107 m for its schools. Wokingham can afford more than the £4655 minimum for each primary pupil and £6050 for secondary pupils laid down by the government with money for 5% above these figures.

There will also be extra payments to cover additional costs of teachers pay awards on top of this grant.

King's speech 3

The Speech needs to tackle problems with restoring productivity in public services, encouraging smarter working with a happier and better rewarded workforce.

1. Repeal the independent management of NHS England, as everyone still blames Ministers for management failings.
2. Reduce layers of management in NHS and strengthen powers of Trust CEOs and Boards
3. Strengthen rights to free speech in universities and Colleges
4. Amend public procurement rules to give proper recognition to the tax and job contributions to UK made by UK based suppliers
5. Require Ministers to hold annual meetings with quangos to 1. Set objectives for the year ahead and agree budgets; 2 to review annual report and accounts; 3 to review performance.
6. Grant NHS patients the right to free treatment in the private sector if the NHS fails to deliver in a stated time
- 7 Block loans to Councils wanting to make commercial investments given the big losses some of them are recording on past attempts at property and green ventures
8. Review and consolidate government property holdings to cut costs and

reduce dominance of expensive London

9. Cut energy use in public sector

10. Charge foreign visitors for using public services