

73% of Conservative members oppose the draft Withdrawal Agreement

I was surprised as many as 23% of Conservative members support the draft Withdrawal Agreement. Maybe they heard the Prime Minister say on tv that we are taking back control of our laws, our money and our borders and ending freedom of movement. We all agree with that. That is exactly what the EU Withdrawal Act achieves. Unfortunately it is not what this Agreement says. The PM must understand that the draft Withdrawal Agreement does the opposite. It means we pay the EU a fortune, stay in everything for at least 21 months and will have to stay in the Customs Union thereafter unless the EU is suddenly very nice to us. As more members read the document or read about it and understand it is not Brexit, I suspect they too will be disappointed.

(Conservative Home survey)

The economic benefits of leaving with no Withdrawal Agreement

The EU's refusal to discuss the future partnership and trade arrangements before we leave means we now have a simple choice. Sign an expensive and damaging deal and try another 21 months or more of talks, or leave and trade under WTO rules on terms we set out. It's obvious we must just leave. Doing so produces many economic advantages

- 1 An immediate substantial improvement in our balance of payments as we cease sending money to the EU
- 2 An end to all the uncertainties about our trade relationship with the EU, which will become much like our trade relationship with the USA and China.
- 3 The ability to increase spending on public service, providing a welcome boost to schools, social care, defence and others, out of the savings.
- 4 Tax cuts to raise take home pay and boost the economy
- 5 If we spent an extra £39 bn on ourselves instead of paying to stay in the EU for longer over the couple of years, that would be a 2% boost to GDP
- 6 Remove VAT from green products and domestic heating fuels, which we are not allowed to do in the EU
- 7 Announce zero tariffs on all components coming in to the UK for industrial assembly, making components from non EU sources cheaper and boosting manufacturers
- 8 Announce cuts in tariffs on food from non EU places, which are currently very high. The new lower tariffs will also of course apply to EU product. Set them to boost domestic agricultural output of things we can grow well.

9 Take control of our fish and rebuild our fishing industry.

10 Limit unskilled and low paid work permits and go for a higher wage more productive economy. Have a migration policy that is fair to all parts of the world and based on our economic needs.

The detail is worse in the Agreement

So as we feared the ECJ has a big role, we cannot unilaterally leave the customs union and may have to stay in for a long time if there is no mutually agreed exit deal. All the government has achieved is the elimination of the Article 50 right to leave we currently enjoy.

Our negotiating power would be dramatically reduced by giving away the money in advance of a deal, and binding ourselves into the customs partnership and law codes of the EU. Remain voters will say being in the EU is better than this, and Leave voters say this is not Brexit. As yesterday in the Commons made clear there is nowhere near a majority for this one sided and damaging Withdrawal Agreement

The Irish backstop treats one part of the UK differently from the rest and is already being used by the SNP against the Union. The huge payments buy us nothing we want and mainly relate to staying in for longer than we wish. Why would the EU bother to agree a good future partnership when they will control us and take our cash without such a deal?

The resignation of 7 more following the 8 who resigned after Chequers must be a record number for a single policy. It makes the defeat of these proposals even more likely as they will all presumably vote against.

The loss of two Brexit Secretaries is more than carelessness

The government has centralised the Brexit negotiations through the PM and Cabinet Office. Senior officials have negotiated under the PM's authority bypassing the Brexit department and sidelining the good negotiating and political advice of two Brexit Secretaries. Cabinet members were not sufficiently involved or informed in crucial issues affecting the whole government and their departments. No wonder there have been so many resignations. Proper process has been ignored with bad results.

Meeting with Berkshire Wildlife Trust

I met representatives of the Wildlife Trust at Parliament yesterday. I said I was keen to see higher standards of animal welfare, to see more trees planted around the country and to seek a local plan for the future that decelerates the rate of housing development. We need to protect more of our countryside, and to keep wild areas where animals can find protected habitats.