

Set the record straight over Boris Johnson's misleading Brexit claims, Starmer tells Barclay

Labour demands minister 'sets the record straight' over Boris Johnson's misleading Brexit claims

Keir Starmer has written to the Brexit Secretary Steve Barclay calling on him to "set the record straight" in Parliament later today over Boris Johnson's misleading Brexit claims. The letter comes ahead of Brexit questions in the House of Commons this morning.

Notes to editors

A copy of Keir Starmer's letter is below:

Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP

Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union

9 Downing Street

London, SW1A 2AG

27 June 2019

Dear Steve

The next Prime Minister will inherit the biggest political crisis this country has faced in recent history. The Government's Brexit deal has been rejected three times, the negotiations are at an impasse and

there are now only four months to go until the October deadline.

If we are to break the deadlock the next Prime Minister will need to have a credible plan and be honest with the British public about the difficult choices ahead.

However, over recent days, Boris Johnson, who you are supporting in the Tory leadership contest, has made a number of misleading claims about the Withdrawal Agreement and about what can be achieved in the negotiations before October:

- **That the UK can rely on GATT 24 to deliver tariff free trade in the event of no deal.** “There will be no tariffs, there will be no quotas because what we want to do is to get a standstill in our current arrangements under GATT 24, or whatever it happens to be, until such a time as we have negotiated the

[free trade agreement]

.”ⁱ

- **That the UK can cherry pick the Withdrawal Agreement.** “You disaggregate the elements of the otherwise defunct Withdrawal Agreement... You reserve the payment of the £39 billion... That is in the context of the Free Trade Agreement, that we’ll negotiate in the implementation period, after we’ve come out on Oct 31st”.ⁱⁱ
- **That there are existing technological solutions to the Northern Ireland border.** “There are abundant, abundant technical fixes that can be introduced to make sure that you don’t have to have checks at the border.”ⁱⁱⁱ
- **That Parliament would support a no deal.** “I do [believe I can get no deal through Parliament] ... I think Parliament now understands.”^{iv}
- **That we can have a standstill transition without a withdrawal agreement.** “I think that the way to come out is with a standstill between the UK and

the EU so that we keep going with the existing arrangements until such time as we've completed our free trade agreement and we use that period to solve the questions of the Northern Irish border. I think we can do that.”^v

You will know as well as I do that these claims are not based in reality.

As Secretary of State and a supporter of Boris Johnson's campaign, you have an opportunity – and I believe a duty – to set the record straight and present an honest assessment of the difficult choices facing the next Prime Minister. I'm writing to ask that you do this at this morning's Brexit questions in the House of Commons.

If these claims are not corrected, then I believe the next administration will repeat the mistakes of its predecessor, with false promises, empty rhetoric and unrealistic red lines.

I look forward to your reply in the Commons later today.

Yours sincerely,

Keir Starmer QC MP

Shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union

[i]

BBC News, [Gatt 24: Would obscure trade rule help with no-deal Brexit?](#) 24 June 2019

[ii]

PoliticsHome, [Cabinet ministers tear into Boris Johnson's plan for no-deal Brexit](#), 23 June 2019

[iii]

BBC News, [In full: Boris Johnson interview with BBC's Laura Kuennsberg](#), 24 June 2019

[iv]

BBC News, [In full: Boris Johnson interview with BBC's Laura Kuennsberg](#), 24 June 2019

[v]

Talk Radio, [Boris Johnson – the talkRADIO interview](#), 25 June 2019

[NAO Data report – Jo Platt responds](#)

Jo Platt MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office, responding to the NAO's report showing that data is not seen as a priority by government, said:

"The Conservatives are a party unfit for the digital age.

"A cocktail of poor leadership, ignorance and austerity has left the Government unable to capitalise on the power of data. This has undermined policies and worsened already desperate situations such as Windrush.

"Labour in government will tackle head on the challenges of delivering modern, digital government, and we will harness the power of data so it works for the many."

[Tory race is choice between man who broke NHS and man who will sell it to Trump](#)

Andrew Gwynne MP, Labour's National Campaign Co-ordinator, commenting on the run-off between Jeremy Hunt and Boris Johnson, said:

"What a choice: the man who broke the NHS or the man who wants to sell it to Donald Trump.

"A handful of unrepresentative Conservative members should not be choosing our next Prime Minister. People should decide through a General Election."

[National Audit Office report on UK ODA spending shows government's approach to aid budget is failing – Preet Gill](#)

Responding to today's National Audit Office report on UK ODA spending, Labour's Shadow Minister for International Development, Preet Gill, said:

"It is clear that the government's approach of spending huge chunks of the aid budget through departments other than DFID is failing.

"The government needs to urgently step up transparency across all departments to ensure every penny of our aid works towards eradicating poverty overseas.

“Rather than using it to plug gaps in other departmental budgets, Labour will put a freeze on the proportion of aid spent by departments other than DFID.”

Ministers wilfully disregarded evidence Saudi Arabia was violating international humanitarian law – Emily Thornberry

Emily Thornberry MP, Labour’s Shadow Foreign Secretary, responding to the judgement by the court of appeal that British arms sales to Saudi Arabia are unlawful, said:

“This devastating judgement proves everything Labour has been saying for years: that Ministers have wilfully disregarded the evidence that Saudi Arabia was violating international humanitarian law in Yemen, while nevertheless continuing to supply them with weapons.

“What we now need is a full parliamentary or public inquiry to find out how that was allowed to happen, and which Ministers were responsible for those breaches of the law. This also shows beyond doubt why we need the root-and-branch reform of our arms export rules that Labour has promised, so these decisions are never again made by Ministers in such a careless, reckless and arbitrary way.

“And immediately, the government must suspend all arms sales for use in the conflict in Yemen until there has been a full and independent, UN-led investigation into all breaches of international law.”