

My contribution to the debate on Leaving the EU: Impact on the UK, 17 March 2021

I welcome the opportunity to debate the many opportunities that Brexit presents. It was always the case that, once we had achieved Brexit, the Government needed to use the freedoms it brings to promote the greater health and prosperity of United Kingdom citizens. We meet today with a success already as a result of these freedoms. The United Kingdom Government decided last year not to join the common vaccine procurement system of the European Union. They went their own way. They had confidence in British science and in British medicine, and they had confidence in great companies based in the United Kingdom and in our great universities.

It is tremendous news that, as a result, the United Kingdom helped pioneer one of the first successful vaccines. The United Kingdom pre-ordered a very large number of vaccines for United Kingdom people on the basis that some of these vaccines would be good and would be available for use, and that put the United Kingdom in the position to vaccinate much earlier, saving more lives than those countries can that were not in the happy position of having early supplies of vaccine. Even our regulators were quicker and more agile. Our regulators gave regulatory approval to the first vaccines some weeks before the European regulator, though the European regulator came to the same view in due course.

I think this is a model for how we can use our freedoms more widely to promote our health and better prosperity. I would draw the Government's attention to a very important policy initiative from President Biden. They may find it surprising to see me recommending something from a Democrat President, but I think his 24 February Executive order—looking at America's supply chains, and saying that America can do much better at developing its own technology, putting in its own industrial capacity and creating many better-paid jobs by having more capacity in the United States—is a model we should follow. Indeed, it is the model we have been following with the development of the vaccine, which has led to more good jobs in the United Kingdom and more United Kingdom productive capacity.

The Biden initiative starts with a very rapid—100-day—attempt to fix the need for the United States of America to have a much bigger presence in pharmaceuticals, batteries, rare earths and minerals, and semiconductors. There is then an annual programme, involving all the relevant Departments of Government, of going through the supply chains and asking what can be done to use innovation funding, Government procurement and Government regulation to encourage more onshoring and more exciting technical developments. Of course, a country needs to have strong competition law and not to abuse state aids, but many good things can be done with the massive procurement programmes of the British Government, like those of the American Government, to encourage competitive responses in the United Kingdom and to encourage that increasing

capacity.

I hope the Government will do more on both the Northern Ireland border issue, where I think we need to be firm—and I support their recent action—and on the fishing industry, where I think we need more rapid progress to build up our fleet and to take back control of more of our fish. That was the promise and that is clearly the intended journey, but I wish the Government would be firmer, because I do not think that at the moment we have the right deal to promote that industry. If we wish to develop our green policies, as we do, we need to do more at home, cut the food miles, cut the fish miles and have more value added in the United Kingdom.