

My Speech at the Westminster Hall debate on the UK's Energy Security Strategy

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): I welcome any measure to buttress our energy security. Ministers are right to be alert to the difficulties we face. I am concerned about this decade. Once again in this debate, we have heard many ideas about nuclear, wind and solar—new technologies that may make a great contribution in the next decade—but our task today is to reinforce all the things that the Minister is doing to keep our lights on for the next three or four years. Our more immediate task is to see what contribution the United Kingdom can make to getting Russian gas and oil out of the European system. We need to make our contribution, providing more of that supply from our domestic sources as part of our war effort. We need our people, who want to keep the lights on and the boilers running, to feel secure that we will make our contribution in case Russia turns the taps off.

Wera Hobhouse MP (Lib): It is simply not true that renewable energy projects will take until next decade to be developed. In fact, many of them are waiting; it is just that they cannot be connected to the grid. Can the right hon. Gentleman correct what he has just said about renewable energy projects?

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): I am afraid that the hon. Lady, and other Members who have made similar contributions, do not understand that I am dealing with the problem of intermittency. In order for all the extra wind they want to be useful, there needs to be a way of timesharing the wind power. We already have days on which wind and solar together produce less than 10% of our electricity, and most of our constituents are not using electricity to drive or to heat their homes, so that is a very small proportion of our total energy.

The vision of wind requires mass battery storage—we seem to be years away from the technology and the investment required to do that—and/or conversion to hydrogen. Green hydrogen would be a perfectly good answer, but again, we are years away from the investment, the practicalities and the commercial projects that could turn that wind energy into hydrogen. My constituents would love it if they could get hydrogen today. They do not want to have to rip out their gas boiler; they would quite like to be able to route more hydrogen through the existing gas boiler and make their contribution to the green revolution.

However, MPs have to be realistic. Our prime duty is to ensure that our constituents can live in relative prosperity, keep the lights on and have access to decent energy for their requirements. At the moment, most of our constituents get to work and to the shops using a diesel or petrol van or car; most heat their homes and water with a gas, oil or coal boiler. Very few use electric technology for that. If there was the great popular electrical

revolution that they have bought into, and they could suddenly afford the electrical products and liked them, we would have a huge problem, because we would be chronically short of electricity generating capacity.

The true electrical revolution on the scale that Wera Hobhouse would like would require an enormous investment in new electrical capacity. If everybody went home tonight and plugged in their car, which uses more electricity than the rest of the home, and heated their homes using electricity, there would need to be a big increase in capacity. The hon. Lady is shaking her head. She wants to get real! Does she really want to cut off her constituents because she so hates them using gas?

Wera Hobhouse MP (Lib): This is about choices. We cannot forever get stuck in the past, as we have just heard. We need to look forward to the future. Investment in renewables is the only way I can see as the right way forward. Yes, that needs adaptation; yes, that needs our constituents to come along. However, it is a necessity. We cannot bury our heads in the sand.

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): Once again, the hon. Lady is in denial. She will not answer the intermittency problem. Does she ever look at the hourly and daily statistics on the grid to see, quite often, how little of our power is renewable-generated? That is because of physics and weather. We have to find technological answers to that. Now, there are technological answers, but at the moment they are not being adopted. They are not commercial and they have not been trialled properly; there may be safety issues and all sorts of things.

Peter Dowd MP (Lab): Yes, they have.

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman says that they have been trialled. Why are they not there, then? Why can I not turn on my hydrogen tap now? There are all sorts of commercial issues and issues about how to route it to every home and so forth.

Peter Dowd MP (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is so fixed on this idea of commerciality. There will potentially come a point when the taxpayer—for the sake of argument—decides that the Government are going to invest. I know that the right hon. Gentleman has an ideological obsession with the Government not doing that. However, in the current situation, does he not agree that the state might sometimes have to do just that?

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): But that is happening. We already have one of the most over-managed systems because successive Governments have put in all sorts of subsidies, tax breaks, interventions, price controls and all the rest of it to try to send those signals. That is why we have the current mix—it is not the exact mix the market would have produced.

I fully accept that there is often a role for Government when we try to develop new technologies. I have no problem with that. However, it does require agreement on what that technology is, agreement on the scale of the effort needed and realism about how many years it would take. It is all very

well for the Members present to say that they have a vision of everybody using an electric car and having a heat pump. However, if their constituents cannot afford it or do not want it, it does not matter what Members think—they have to deal with the world as it is. We cannot lecture our constituents into having a heat pump. They will have a heat pump when it is affordable, when it is a good product and when they think it makes sense, and they are nowhere near coming to that conclusion at the moment.

The crucial question in this debate is what more the United Kingdom can do at this critical moment. We have to help our allies and friends on the continent who are gas short and oil short and want to get Russia out of their supply system but cannot do so because it would collapse their industry, while Russia is financing a war by selling its oil and gas into Europe as well as elsewhere. I think there is a lot more we can do.

I urge the Minister to see it as both a patriotic duty and a crucial duty to our allies to work closely with our producers and owners of oil and gas reserves in the United Kingdom and maximise output as quickly as possible. Some of the output can be increased quite quickly; for others, it will take two or three years to get the investments in. Will the Minister do everything he can to expedite it? We owe that to our constituents, because gas and oil are too dear—every little extra that we can produce will make a little difference—and confidence in markets might be affected. Above all, we owe it to our allies, who will otherwise be financing Putin's war.