

# My speech in response to the Queen's Speech

I begin by saying how much I agree with our colleagues from Northern Ireland who rightly want Northern Ireland to be as fully part of our internal market as it always has been and as the Northern Ireland protocol says it should be.

I urge the Government, with our Northern Ireland colleagues, to urgently negotiate a solution with the EU so that we can have full access to and from Northern Ireland for normal commerce, or, if the EU is determined not to allow that to happen, to take the administrative steps necessary to make sure that our internal market works smoothly and argue the case that the Northern Ireland protocol states that that is part of its objective and so should be enforced.

I welcome many things in the Gracious Speech. I am glad that the Government give great priority to providing the resources to support the innovations and new ideas in the health service. The health service needs to build itself back on all the non-covid-19 treatments and procedures after its valiant fight against this awful illness, and it will take those extra resources that the Government are promising.

There are innovations in the way that healthcare can be delivered, treatment offered and investigations undertaken following the covid-19 period that I am sure our Secretary of State will be very keen to ensure the NHS works up professionally to make a better service.

However, I urge the Government to address a series of problems that seem to be cropping up in various parts of the country relating to some surgeries that are not up to the standards of the best or the good regarding access to healthcare and appointments.

I think everybody wants the reassurance that as the NHS gets back to a better balance in its working, everyone who feels they need an appointment can get through on the phone or on the internet and have early triage and early settlement in a suitable online or face-to-face appointment, depending on their needs.

We are hearing about cases at some surgeries around the country where people cannot get through, where the phone lines are restricted, where the timing of the phone calls is limited, or where there are not enough appointments on offer and no forward booking. I hope that there can be guidelines on minimum standards so that people everywhere feel that they have access to excellent NHS care just as most people do who have good surgeries and good doctors.

I welcome the animal welfare measures in the proposals. One of benefits of making more of our own decisions is that we can and should set higher welfare standards, and I am glad that the Government are taking that up.

I welcome the wish to do more for veterans, and we must ensure that the covenant is properly legislated for. I hope the Government will consider the whole issue of housing, because one unsatisfactory feature of some service careers and lives is that when people leave after many years of good service, they have no deposit for a house and there is no availability of one, because they have been living in service-provided accommodation for many years.

I hope the Government will consider more imaginative schemes that either support service personnel to buy a home of their own while still in the services, or help them with savings and the necessary arrangements to get the right combination of deposit and mortgage when they leave after many years of good service. We want our veterans to be better housed, and not to fall through the cracks because of the service they have given and their dependence on state-provided accommodation that lasts only as long as their service.

I hope the Government will take a stronger line on defending our fish and restoring our fishing industry. We must do lots of work before the so-called transition is over. Many Brexit voters look to the Government to provide that back-up to our fishing industry, and to ensure proper standards, regulation and control of our fishing grounds, and that our own industry is properly looked after.

I also hope we will soon get some VAT reductions or cancellations. VAT was imposed on a range of items that, if left to its own devices, the UK Parliament probably would not have chosen. That should be part of the Brexit bonus.

I hope the Government will work more, as the Gracious Speech implied, on national resilience. That issue is becoming common—indeed, President Biden is working hard on that in the United States of America. We have seen how, if we become too dependent on overseas interests, we must be careful in the field of energy. We have seen our French neighbours threatening Jersey over the energy supply that it currently receives from an interconnector to France.

I hope the Government will learn a lesson from that. Interconnectors under the sea are vulnerable if other countries are hostile to us, because of the physical location of the cable. We should move our policy from one of increasing dependence on more interconnectors to import energy, to one of wanting self-sufficiency and capacity in the United Kingdom. We always used to have that, and surely it would be a good source of jobs and investment if we set ourself the target of getting back to meeting our own needs in whatever suitable style the Government wish.

I am glad the Government are talking about broadband and threats to the internet. We must ensure that, with the right amount of Government support and a great deal of private-led investment, we get fast broadband throughout the country, for both business and home use, as that is a big part of our future.

We saw how dependent we have become on broadband as we made special arrangements for the pandemic, and many of those changes will live on in

whole or in part. We therefore need that much better capacity and performance. The national resilience strategy must ensure some of the building blocks. Indeed, we literally need more building blocks, basic materials and capacity for the construction industry, but we must also produce enough of things such as steel and aluminium to have that resilience should problems emerge in the world's supply system.

I am pleased that the Government will consider public procurement. Now that we are free to make more of our own decisions, it is right to review the huge sums of money that the Government spend on buying in goods and services, and ask ourselves whether, while preserving sensible competitive process, we can ensure that more of that money is well spent on United Kingdom supply. In some areas I feel that we resort too easily to the overseas option, and at a time when other great countries around the world are taking steps to ensure more of their own internal capacity, the United Kingdom must do that as well.

Building back better should be about making sure, with that right mixture of public demand—perhaps sometimes with public pump-priming, but more often with a lot of private investment—that we start to replace some of that lost capacity and substitute for some of those imports, because our balance of payments deficit is still very large.

I was very interested to see a quote from the Labour deputy leader, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), in recent days, where she said:

“Working-class people don't want a handout or someone telling us what we should think. We want the opportunities to do it for ourselves.”

I think those are a great couple of sentences. In a way, the Government have got there first, and quite a few of the things that the Government are saying and some of the things that the Government are doing in this Gracious Speech are about just that.

Levelling up is not about making people more dependent on the state throughout the country with a sort of competitive bidding process to see who can get the most money from the state; it is about spending state money intelligently and making state interventions intelligently where only the state can go in areas such as transport and support for those in difficulty, while at the same time generating many more good private sector jobs, allowing many more businesses to flourish and allowing many more people to gain skills and trade for themselves. Through that we can have a more diverse, more private sector-led economy in the areas of the country that have not been as prosperous or have had higher unemployment than we would like.

I welcome everything in the Queen's Speech, which promotes a great recovery and offers many more hand-ups for people, so that they do not need so many handouts. We need to have that active promotion of success and ensure that people feel they have opportunities. We have to make sure that companies feel they have opportunities, that there will be more better-paid jobs, that we help people who wish to train for them and that training is available so that people can go on that journey from a less well paid job to a better-paid job.

Above all, we need more measures—tax and otherwise—to help people expand their own small businesses or to see that self-employment is a good option that might give them a better life and a higher income. We do that by lower taxes, by smarter regulations and by a Government who spend their money on buying great UK products and services and allow some of that spending to filter into small companies, as well as into the usual large companies that provide so much of the public procurement that is domestically provided.

I welcome the Queen's Speech. I want to see a rapid and strong recovery. I want a recovery that is all about many more better-paid jobs, harnessing a lot more private investment, expanding our industrial and service provision capacity and widening people's boundaries and opportunities.

I trust that our freeports, when they come, will have wide boundaries and a very generous offer, because they could be some of the pioneers of the enterprise spirit we will need in the places that we wish to level up. I wish to see the right repairs and improvements to the public estate, so that it is something of which we are proud. That goes alongside the levelling up, which will entail a lot of private investment and private job creation.

That surely is the future. By all means level up; let us do it by promoting great investment and by having excellence in the public sector, where only the public sector can operate.