

## Parliament turns to other matters

It was a welcome development this week that Parliament avoided more Groundhog day debates on Brexit. We all know each other's positions and have heard the arguments regurgitated all too often. Instead we talked of social care and schools, amongst other matters.

There was considerable agreement from all parties in the Commons that social care and schools need more generous financial settlements. The topic of school funding was introduced by a Conservative MP and drew warm support from the Labour front bench as you might expect. The Labour debate on social care also saw Conservative MPs accepting the need for better settlements.

The odd thing about this Parliament is it does not marry its wish to spend more on certain public services with its approach to Brexit. A large majority of MPs on both sides accept the idea that the UK should pay at least £39bn to the EU. Indeed many seem to welcome this, with large payments over the next two years. It is as if the referendum had never happened. I seem to remember day after day debates in that campaign about just how much money we might save, with everyone agreeing there would be large savings but disagreeing over whether to use the gross or net amounts. The public certainly got the idea and by a majority voted to spend the money at home, whether it was £10bn a year, £12 bn a year or more. Why is that so many MPs in this Parliament are so casual with money for Brussels, when they agree we need it for something else?

There is no legal clause in the Treaty requiring us to pay after we have left. The large sum in the Withdrawal Agreement is not nailed down in numbers and would doubtless be bigger than the Treasury £39bn estimate. The Treasury seems to want to pay the money and says we would need to anyway. It is particularly difficult to know why we would have to pay for the next two year's membership if we just left, when that was a big element in the £39bn! Labour came up with a bank tax to pay more to our schools. The Chancellor has collected more tax than he expected, so he could just provide a bit more cash for schools out of that. It would be far better to have a Brexit budget, boosting the UK economy with better funded public services and tax cuts, all paid for from saving all that money to the EU. The Schools Minister was left explaining he and his colleagues were going to put in a good bid for the Autumn Spending Review. By implication he too thinks there is a good case for bit more cash.