

Speech: Leader of the Commons addresses Institute for Government

Introduction

It's a great pleasure to be here this evening, to share with you my belief that this will be a cooperative and collegiate Parliament.

In spite of the, at times, very heated exchanges in the Chamber, which can oddly extend to my choice of clothing(!) –

I get on very well with Valerie Vaz, the Shadow Leader of the House.

And, the same is true for many front benchers, on all sides of the House.

The cut and thrust of debate in the chamber does not always reflect the efficient work going on 'behind the scenes'.

Where in fact, Val and I work closely on a number of House projects, and are both driven by a shared desire for a functioning parliament.

This gets to the very heart of what I would dearly like to see.

And that is a parliament that can work together for the good of the country.

Our late colleague, Jo Cox, was so right when she said, 'we have far more in common than that which divides us.'

The need to work together means that the Government will be listening, and taking into account all views right across the House.

It's often said that the Leader of the House of Commons has two jobs – that of Parliament's representative in Government, and Government's representative in Parliament.

So in the last two weeks, at the request of many different Members across the House:

- We got the Select Committees up and running early;
- I extended the second reading of the EU Withdrawal Bill;
- And provided government time for a debate on illegal traveller encampments, which again, is a topic of concern across the House.

These are all examples of where Members share common ground, and where my role helps to bridge Government and Parliament.

This is a historical time

Now, it won't have escaped anyone's notice that we, in parliament, will be incredibly busy over the coming years.

I suspect that the period between 2016 and 2022 will be the stuff of future PHDs and political textbooks –

And will no doubt shape the next phase in the history of our great country.

Very rarely does the opportunity come along to build on our longstanding principles of tolerance, democracy, and the rule of law – to seize fresh opportunities and forge partnerships with new and old friends alike.

These are exciting and challenging times, in a parliament of great opportunity.

And the job of this Parliament will be to deliver on the vision set out by Theresa May, of a country that works for everyone.

The Government's legislative agenda

So what does that mean for our legislative agenda?

Firstly, crucially, legislation that allows us to deliver a successful Brexit – providing continuity and paving the way for a prosperous future.

Secondly, tackling social injustice and discrimination, to improve life opportunities.

Thirdly, building an economy of higher skills, greater productivity and more rewarding jobs.

Fourthly, to strengthen the precious ties of our union.

And vitally, the fifth challenge is to continue tackling the threat of terrorism, and to keep our country safe.

The Queen's Speech set out an ambitious programme of 27 bills and draft bills.

And so to accommodate the workload of parliament, we have agreed an extended session, that takes us beyond the point at which we leave the European Union.

Brexit

Despite the different views expressed in the referendum, we all share a desire for the United Kingdom to succeed.

In leaving the EU, we will have:

- Control of our own money
- Control of our own laws
- Control of our borders
- And, as the Prime Minister has said, we will be a global leader in promoting free trade

And we have a very positive story to tell:

- The UK is the fifth largest economy in the world;
- Three of our Universities are in the World's Top 10;
- The UK's contract law is world-class, something that is critical for international business;
- The UK is the world's leading financial centre;
- And whilst we all know London is the best capital city in the world, it's been confirmed for several years in a row by the Global Power City Index.

There have been lots of unhelpful metaphors created in the wake of the referendum –

But I prefer to look at the evidence – and the evidence is encouraging.

Since June last year:

- Deutsche Bank have signed a 25 year commitment to a new London headquarters;
- Nissan and Toyota are all investing millions in production;
- Amazon and Google are both expanding their UK operations;
- And Apple, Dyson and ARM are just a few tech companies that have recommitted to their UK HQ's.

Business confidence is critical to our economy, and a strong economy is the only way to keep the excellent public services we all rely on.

So, passing Brexit legislation is a key step towards this new phase in our country's history.

And, I was delighted that this week, we made significant progress – both in passing the 2nd reading of the EU Withdrawal Bill –

And enabling the smooth functioning of parliamentary committees.

Domestic

But as the Prime Minister has made clear, this parliament is about so much more than just leaving the EU.

A strong economy and a fair society is at the heart of a country that works for everyone.

And we are bringing forward wide-ranging legislation to reflect this:

- Such as, new opportunities in emerging technologies;
- Better services for those struggling with mental health conditions;
- And greater support for our armed forces families.

As Chairman of the Parliamentary Business and Legislation Committee, which is known as PBL, it's my job to make sure legislation like this is ready.

You could call it the parliamentary Dragon's Den -giving the business managers and key cabinet colleagues the chance to stress test and scrutinise

all the legislation my colleagues plan to bring forward for introduction.

The level of scrutiny on the legislative programme is greater now than at any time in the last four decades.

My role isn't only to ensure Bills are shipshape – but to make sure they reflect the views of backbenchers, Select Committees, and that MPs know exactly what the legislation will achieve.

As a respected former Leader of the House Lord Young said in an interview with the IfG a couple of years ago – ‘one of the lessons, if you are coming to PBL, is “don't wing it.”’

Conclusion

Now, before I conclude my remarks, I want to come back to where I started.

The result of the general election is a parliament that quite simply must work together.

We have a huge task of delivering Brexit, and the opportunity to shape the kind of country we want to be after we leave the EU.

Frankly, the public do expect us to conduct our debates in a grown-up fashion.

I'm not suggesting for a moment that political disagreement will somehow fade away –

but I do hope Parliament can achieve proper debate, that reflects the seriousness of the task ahead.

So my message at this historic time is a very simple one:

The Government stands ready to listen and engage with all parties, to work in the best interests of the country.

There will be challenges ahead.

But we can all come together to work towards a stronger economy, a fairer society, and taking a central place on the world stage.