

Speech: Our 18 employment records this year show why we need the Prime Minister's Brexit deal

At this critical juncture in our country's history, Brexit dominates, especially in Parliament and the media.

So it is easy to forget the other challenges facing the UK, challenges which have just as big an impact on people's lives and which will continue long after we have left the EU.

Back in 2010, one of those biggest challenges was unemployment. With 2.5 million people without a job, and more redundancies on the way as the financial crisis continued to bite.

Since then, jobs growth has been the biggest success story of the UK economy – creating 3.3 million new jobs as many EU countries struggled with spiralling unemployment with millions of young people being shut out of a job all together.

And today we can say that 2018 has been the best year ever for the UK jobs market. In 2018 we have broken 18 employment records.

From our highest ever employment rate and more people in work than ever before, to record low redundancies and youth unemployment. From record numbers of women, older workers and those from ethnic minority backgrounds in work, to record low gender and ethnic minority pay gaps.

There are fewer households where no-one works than ever before, and fewer children growing up in a workless home. Two years on from the Brexit referendum, the UK jobs market is smashing expectations.

This progress actually matters to people. The prospects of a better future that comes with having a job, knowing that your job is secure, and seeing your wages rise above inflation – as they have in the UK this year.

One of the 18 records we hit this year was having more people than ever before in full-time work, 23.9 million of them, with almost 2.6 million more than in 2010.

Any employer knows that creating a new full-time role is a big investment. But with policies designed to support business, employers have the confidence to make those investments in jobs – over 400,000 in the last year alone.

If, as a result of the Brexit vote in Parliament, MPs create uncertainty about our country's future direction, suddenly those investments will be harder to make. Or worse, businesses may look to cut back on spending and make redundancies. We may have broken 18 employment records in 2018, but our jobs boost could become a jobs bust.

No surprise then that employers, large and small, and groups representing business like the Federation of Small Businesses and the Confederation of British Industry, have warned against a no-deal Brexit and backed the government's Brexit deal.

I also back the deal. That is because I, like them, see a compromise that works. Not a no-deal that cuts some of our most important trade links, or a second referendum that would open our divisions even further.

There are those, including in Parliament, who dismiss the views of business. That is a mistake. Look at another of our 18 records – private sector employment at an all-time high of over 27 million, with over 380,000 more jobs in the last year alone.

More people in the UK work in the private sector than ever before. Those companies support the government's deal because they know it protects their business, without blocking the possible benefits of Brexit like new trade links.

Some may see opportunity in chaos, but employers do not. Create uncertainty, push back Brexit, seek to harden it or stop it all together and you risk the stable economy that has delivered so many employment records. A strong economy we have worked together so hard to deliver.

It is right that MPs debate Brexit ahead of the big vote and everyone gets a chance to have their say. But, when MPs decide whether to back the deal or not, I hope my colleagues on all sides will listen to the employers of this country and deliver the only deal which gives them the certainty they need to make 2019 another record-breaker. And that is the government's Brexit deal.