

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.

Undemocratic MPs who want to reverse the referendum

Take back control of our money, our laws and our borders. It was a straightforward and very popular proposal. It received more votes than any

other idea or party in our democratic history.

More than 82% voted for candidates in the 2017 General election who promised to implement the result. So why are there now so many MPs who will do anything to delay, dilute or cancel Brexit? What part of Leave did they not understand? Why do they presume that they now know better than the voters, and know better than they did themselves when they were seeking votes two years ago?

The TIG s or Change UK have set themselves up as an MP group to help thwart Brexit in the Commons. The BBC gives them plenty of coverage as our national broadcaster panders to the views of a tiny party with MPs as they seem to like their anti Brexit stance. These MPs do not want a general election any time soon and refuse to put themselves up for by elections despite changing the party they were elected to be part of. They get on well together looking down on the majority who voted for Brexit.

You couldnt make it up that Change UK tells us the public do not trust current politics and want change. They are right. The public does want change. The change the public wants is for MPs like them to keep to their election promises and to back Brexit. They say they want a new and better democracy yet they refuse to accept and implement the people's choice. They are the opposite of democrats. They spend most of their time trying to thwart the wishes of the electors. The advocates of a people's vote refuse to accept the verdict of the huge People's vote we did hold.

<https://johnredwoodsdiary.com/>

[My contribution to the Backbench Debate on a Motion relating to School Funding, 25 April 2019](#)

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I represent parts of West Berkshire Council area and parts of Wokingham Borough Council area.

Both councils face exactly the same problems with schools. In both cases, we receive very low amounts per pupil compared with the national average. That means we cannot provide as varied and as richly resourced a curriculum as schools that are better endowed.

But the biggest problem we face today, which I hope the Minister and his colleagues will address urgently, is on High Needs. High Needs should be the area that we are keenest to help on. The pupils that require that special

support need to be properly supported financially from the centre as well as well supported by the local professionals.

In the case of West Berkshire, I am advised there will be 9% more pupils needing that support this year and their budget only gone up by 0.5%. So, I ask the Minister, how does he think we manage to pay for all those extra pupils who need that extra support when the budget is so mealy set?

And in Wokingham, too, there is quite rapid growth in numbers requiring support and very little growth in the money being made available. Wokingham has the additional problem that because we are an extremely fast-growing part of the country, taking a very large number of new houses, we are way behind in putting in the necessary educational provision for special needs so that Wokingham now has to find facilities for a 119 special needs pupils outside the Borough because nobody has bothered to make the money available so that we can catch-up. It would be better, and probably better value as well, if more of that provision could be made locally close to where the children and their parents live and this is not an option given the delay.

I have raised with the Minister before the issue about general school's funding which has been made more difficult by the rapid growth in pupil numbers. I am pleased to say that we now do have a new secondary school and three new primary schools that have gone in relatively recently to catch-up with the backlog in the provision of places for this very fast-growing part of the country. But that creates its own financial problems which the Minister and his system does not recognise.

The first problem we have is there is delay in getting the money in for the new schools as the provision goes in so the budgets of the other schools are squeezed. The next thing that happens is that when we have last got, for example, our new secondary school it makes a lot of places available all in one go because it establishes itself with a certain capacity and then pupils are attracted to that school, perfectly reasonably, and are taken away from other schools and those other schools then face an immediate cut in the amount of money they have because suddenly they don't have the right number of pupils to sustain the budget. It will would take time to slim down their offer and sometimes it will be very painful and difficult to do. Again, the system is simply too inflexible to recognise this is a basic requirement of the system.

And, if it means we have a few more places to give parents more choice I think that is good, but I'm a realist, you have to pay for it Minister and we expect the Minister to do so representing a Government which says it believes in parental choice and believes in high standards for pupils going to state schools, something which the Minister and I entirely agree about.

If I ever am tempted in to give a talk or to visit an independent school if I go to the really well-endowed ones I just see a different world in terms of the library resources, the range of curriculum on offer, the sporting facilities and the support they get because money does buy you something better. I want the pupils that go to state schools in West Berkshire and Wokingham to have access to the best and we simply cannot do that on the

current budget.

So, Minister, this Government should stop trying to £39 billion to the European Union to delay our exit for two to four years when the public voted to get out. Let's go hold of the money Minister. Let's put it where it matters, let's put it into social care, let's put it into schools, let's have some tax cuts for hard pressed families so they can provide more for their own children. That is what the public want. Get on with it Minister.

[My intervention during the debate on Local Government and Social Care Funding, 24 April 2019](#)

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): My area is one that got a really bad deal under past Governments and is still getting a bad deal. Let me build a bit of cross-party support. It is obvious that the Government have to find more money for social care for future year budgets, and it needs to go to my area and some areas represented by Opposition Members. It needs to be done fairly, but what is Labour's current thinking on how much individuals and families should contribute, because in social care, one of the big issues is how much of the family asset and income is at risk? Does it have any new thinking on that?

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Of course, individuals and families are taking the hit from all the cuts, and they are having to step in.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): rose—

Andrew Gwynne: Let me answer the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) first. We have to have a sensible discussion about how we are going to fund social care. Yes, it is about money, and we have pledged to ensure that there is £8 billion for social care—that was in Labour's manifesto in the 2017 general election—and we need to make sure that that commitment remains in our future manifesto and is updated, because it needs that immediate cash injection to start with. However, we also need to look very seriously at how we provide adult social care.

I really do wish that we could try to break down some of the politicking that has gone on for far too long—[*Interruption.*] Members can heckle, but it is a fact that before the 2010 general election, Andy Burnham, the then Health Secretary, sat down with the Liberal Democrat health spokesperson and the Conservative health spokesperson to try to work out a way forward. We went into that 2010 general election with poster boards about Labour's "death tax". That serves nobody. We need to make sure that we will have something that is sustainable for the long term, and I hope that we can genuinely get

to a place where we can do that and talk about how we fund adult social care and children's services going forward.

The case for free enterprise

Listening to debates in the Commons, the air is often thick with criticisms of companies and entrepreneurs. To many MPs companies are sources of tax revenue for their pet projects, run by people who will do harm unless regulated strictly against every risk. MPs who think like this should get out more.

Many of the things that are essential to our lives are supplied by free enterprise, and most of the pursuits that people most enjoy are supplied from private sector innovations and sources. Our food is grown by competing farmers and supplied by competing manufacturers and retailers. Our homes are built by competing construction companies. Our entertainments are private sector creations, delivered on innovatory technology that comes from a range of technology and consumer goods companies.

Parliament has to spend much of its time (when it is not groundhog day on Brexit again) debating the delivery of those services which are public sector. The NHS, schools, railways and roads are largely or wholly public sector provided and are appropriately the topic of many debates and rows. There is scarcity built into most public sector supply. We are short of GP appointments, short of roadspace, short of good quality school places in fast growing parts of the country, and short of commuter rail capacity at peaks when we most need the provision. There are problems raising quality and efficiency levels in parts of these public services. Top down allocation of cash causes arguments about its adequacy and distribution. The providers so often look upwards to the cash allocators, rather than outward to the users of the services.

The free enterprise model builds in natural incentives to innovate, to raise quality and to drive efficiency. If Company A fails to grasp the move from blackberries to ipads, Company B will and will take the business. If Company C fails to adopt better technology and machine power to make its employees more productive, Company D will and will be able to undercut Company C. If Company E gets a bad reputation for safety, people will switch to Company F that takes it seriously. If Company G treats its employees badly, they can shift to Company H who treats them well and gets a much better result for customers and shareholders as a result.

The public sector model has to try to find ways to substitute for the lack of consumer power in driving innovation and quality. Various ways have been tried, but these often are less good. The Highways Authority regularly shuts down sections of main routes without thought for the delays and problems caused to users, because it suffers no financial penalty for its failure and

there is no alternative network to turn to. Network Rail regularly experiences signal failures and bottlenecks on its network delaying passengers and preventing innovative new services to meet demand, because it does not have to do better to survive. If it makes a mess it just demands more taxpayers cash to put it right. Obvious bypass track and short sections of new track to create more capacity and new links do not get put in because they cannot be bothered to respond to potential demand or to improve the traveller experience.

The popular thing about main public services including schools and hospitals is they are free to users at the point of use. The main political parties are united in defending this principle. Other public services like railways rely on user charging, and roads rely on heavy taxation of motorists well in excess of the cost of provision. None of these financing models need rule out greater consumer choice, which could help raise quality and efficiency.