

Another round of Project fear

It is strange to read stories coming from people in or close to the government telling us leaving without a deal will be bad, saying the government has not done all it needs to do to leave on March 29, and playing up any bad economic or business news that comes along. Normally governments are guilty of putting too optimistic a spin on events. Not this one, who often seem to prefer the EU spin line against us.

Most of it is Project Fear reheated. It was that very Project Fear replete with precise and wildly wrong forecasts for jobs, house prices, growth and business for 2016-17 that did much to lose the vote for Remain. Most of us want sensible optimism not remorseless and inaccurate pessimism.

The Prime Minister and government has had 2 years 7 months to get everything ready to leave on March 29. They have told us officially they can do that, though there are plenty of leaks, hints, statements of individual off message Ministerial opinion saying the opposite. The PM has always been consistent in saying we will leave on 29 March with or without a deal. She has always said you cannot take no deal off the table as it is important to the negotiation, and has always said we can just leave if necessary. She of course would much prefer a deal, but has difficulty persuading MPs her Withdrawal Agreement is acceptable. It is of an expensive invitation to another 21 months of talks about a future relationship. This prolongs the uncertainty for business and delays an economic boost from spending our former EU contributions on our priorities.

It is clear the planes will fly, the trucks will pass through Calais and Dover in good time and there will be no food or drug shortages. I am not going to stockpile anything. It looks as if the pressure for a second referendum has abated, which anyway cannot be held before 29 March now. The Remain forces in Parliament now want delay. They have failed to say what we could agree after March that we have been unable to agree in the 2 years 9 months since the vote, and failed to spell out why the EU would let us have a delay to renegotiate and on what terms. The UK has no plans to offer candidates for the European parliament so will not be part of the full governance arrangements of the EU from that date. We need to get on with leaving. I am still pressing the UK government to offer a free trade agreement and use of Article 24 of the GATT to avoid tariffs and other new barriers when we leave in March

Working throughout February

I had no plans to take a holiday and was intending to work as normal when Parliament planned a February recess. I am very willing to attend Parliament

to do anything to ensure a smooth exit from the EU on 29 March on any dates between now and then.

An unhappy Euro area and a squeezed car industry

The news that hundreds or even 2000 people have now been injured in the French protests is worrying. There have been at least 10 deaths, according to press reports. There is also a controversy raging in France over the use of police weapons.

It seems to be true that the police themselves have suffered in these protests and have experienced injuries. They are allowed to use guns that fire large rubber bullets, and to release grenade type crowd control devices that contain explosives and scatter more rubber bullets on detonation. There have been cases of people losing part of their hand from these explosions, and reports of blinded and injured eyes from the bullets.

The gilet jaune protests began against high and rising fuel taxes. The symbol and uniform of the protesters is the gilet jaune that all car drivers have to carry in their vehicle to wear in case of emergency. It is an irony that a protest which is part a protest about the attacks on motorists should use as its symbol an item of clothing demanded by a regulatory requirement . It makes it impossible for the authorities to ban carrying such items or using them by displaying them prominently in a car as a symbol of support for the movement.

Meanwhile Italy is in recession and Germany had a fall in output in the third quarter, with a weak fourth quarter as well. Economies are crying out for some stimulus. The motor industry has been particularly hard hit by restrictive credit policies and by tax attacks on the purchase , owning and use of vehicles. EU emission rules changes disrupted production and sales, and Chinese demand for German cars fell away quickly.

Even the UK industry has suffered from all this, which isn't anything to do with Brexit and has happened before we have been allowed to leave the EU. In the UK high VED increases, a squeeze on car loans and threats of more bans and taxes on diesel vehicles has as predicted here cut output and sales and slashed investment. The UK government should put together a better tax and regulatory package to stabilise and improve sales and output before more damage is done.

Better healthcare

I am taking an interest in how the extra money for the NHS will be spent. It is most important that NHS England comes up with a proper plan of what they are trying to achieve by way of expansion and service improvements, so they can then test out how many extra staff they may need and what new contracts they should sign to deliver the better healthcare.

I understand that the Health Secretary is engaged on just such an exercise. I would be interested to hear from people, especially constituents, on what would be sensible requests for spending this additional cash. My priorities include wanting a well staffed GP service locally so that patients can get appointments that are timely and GPs feel they have manageable workloads so they can provide the best possible service. I think we do need some more hospital capacity for the most common procedures to reduce waiting times and provide some choice and flexibility for patients over when and where they receive treatment.

Local services need to be expanded to reflect the additional homes and increase in population. I share the government's wish to see better mental health provision where there are proven protocols and treatments that can make a difference to people in need of help.

The government is considering the role of technology in future medical services and care. How far do patients want to go with digital booking, or even remote consultations? I am keen that this should be based on patient preference rather than a mandatory conversion, as healthcare is a private and individual matter where the patient needs to feel happy with the system. Patients need to trust the doctor and the way he or she works for it stand most chance of being a success.

New primary free school announced for Shinfield West, Wokingham

I have received this letter from the Department for Education:

Dear Sir John Redwood,

Statement of Intent for a new primary free school in Shinfield West, Wokingham

I am writing to inform you that Keys Academy Trust has been given Secretary of State approval to sponsor the new free school, which is proposed to open from September 2019 or September 2020.

Since Floreat Education Academies Trust withdrew from the project in May 2018, Wokingham Borough Council invited proposals from other potential sponsors under section 6A (the free school presumption') of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (referred to as the Act'). Following the local authority's assessment of the proposals received, the Secretary of State has agreed, in principle, that sponsorship of the new free school be awarded to Keys Academy Trust.

With effect from May 2015, all new schools established under s6a of the Act have been classified as free schools. The school is not required to use the term 'free school' in its name, in line with practice within the department's centrally managed free schools programme.

Letters have also been sent to Wokingham Borough Council and Keys Academy Trust informing them of the decision.

Yours sincerely

Martin Post
Regional Schools Commissioner, North West London and South central