My Intervention on the Post Office Horizon Ministerial Statement

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

Will the Minister take UK Government Investments out of its role of controlling and supervising the Post Office? It has allowed these gross injustices to go on for too long, allowed the Post Office senior managers to rack up huge losses of £1,391 million to last March, with more to come this year, and given the executives bonuses for losing us that much money. It has left the Government with a great financial black hole. Would it not be better to change the Post Office management, to have it report directly to the Minister, and to make its No. 1 task giving justice to the sub-postmasters?

Kevin Hollinrake:

I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. He and I have had serious conversations about the future of the Post Office, which I am keen to continue to engage on. The current UKGI representative who sits on the Post Office board is Lorna Gratton, for whom I have a great deal of time and respect. Clearly it is important that the inquiry does its work to determine who did what in the past. As we look to the future, there are different opinions on how the Post Office should be governed. I am happy to keep those discussions ongoing with my right hon. Friend.

My Interventions in the Northern Ireland address – 2

Mr Baker:

If my right hon. Friend will agree, I would like to have a meeting with him, because I am very clear that the scope of law that can apply in Northern Ireland is that which is necessary to ensure the smooth flow of goods.

I have said before at this Dispatch Box that we were always going to have special arrangements for Northern Ireland. When I resigned from the then Government in 2018, the issue that I forced among our colleagues in the European Research Group was that of Northern Ireland. We wrote a paper that said that there would need to be alternative administrative and technical arrangements so that there could be an open border with the Republic of Ireland. We understood that there would be special arrangements. There was never going to be an open border with no arrangements to deal with it, and there was never going to be a hard border; it was always going to be

necessary to do something unique and special in Northern Ireland.

As I have also said at this Dispatch Box, had this country gone forward with one united voice in accepting the referendum result, and had this country enjoyed the good quality of relations with Ireland and the EU that we enjoy today, we might have done better than leaving in place some EU law in Northern Ireland. I wish we had, but after all we have been through and the eight years it has taken to do it, I think that this settlement taken overall—the Windsor framework plus the Command Paper, including the Humble Address we are debating today—represents the moment to bank what I regard as a win and move forward constructively in the best interests of all the people of the UK, but also the people of the Republic of Ireland.

John Redwood:

Let me reassure the Minister that the Secretary of State gave me a very clear assurance in this House that we can legislate for VAT for Northern Ireland —so I am not quite sure why he was querying that.

My Interventions on the Norther Ireland address – VAT

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

When I last asked him in the House, the Secretary of State assured us that this House can now legislate for VAT in Northern Ireland, which was a very welcome assurance. Can the Minister explain how far the EU can go in legislating for Northern Ireland if we in the Unionist community are not very happy with that?

Mr Baker:

I refer my right hon. Friend to the table on page 4 of the Command Paper, which answers his question somewhat more broadly. That table compares Northern Ireland to Ireland as an illustrative member state and Norway as a European economic area state, and goes through the ways in which the status of Northern Ireland, EU membership and EEA membership differ. Anyone looking at that table can see that Northern Ireland is in a completely different place.

When it comes to the specific issue of the extent to which Northern Ireland can be legislated for by the EU, I refer my right hon. Friend to the democratic consent mechanism for the overall arrangement—the first vote on which will take place later in the year—and also to the Stormont brake, to which we could return but which we have covered in previous debates. I have known my right hon. Friend very well for a number of years; I have followed

his thoughts on this issue since some years before I was a Member, and I am reluctant to give him a very specific answer on the issue of VAT. I know he will have followed the details, and the last thing I want to do is give him an incorrect answer.

My Speech at the Cambridge Union – This House does NOT believe in a United States of Europe

Please find below the link to download my Speech at the Cambridge Union:

CUS This House Believes In A United States of Europe – Opposition 1 – Sir John Redwood [Do Not Publish]

Wokingham Borough consults, ignores, then blames someone else.

The Lib Dem Council refuses to accept responsibility for the chronic waste of money and the bad scheme for California Crossroads. Conservatives opposed this scheme, seeing its unpopularity when listening to public opinion. This Council approved it and decided to spend £5.5 million on it.

Lib Dems complain that as MP I did not regularly criticise the Council when it was Conservative controlled. That was for two reasons. The first is it was better run. The second is the Council invited me in or to zoom meetings with the Chief Executive to go through matters of common concern for the public. I had regular email and phone exchanges with the Leader so I knew what was going on and could influence it. I could work closely with the Council where they needed help from the government. When the new Lib Dem Council was elected I accepted an invitation to a preliminary meeting. I offered them the same behind the scenes support I had offered the previous administration. I said I would take up any sensibly argued proposal that needed government support or money. They have subsequently failed to take these offers up. I do not receive briefings about their financial condition, for example.

Despite this lack of normal co-operation I have taken up things I assume they want without their help or information to back my case. I have successfully persuaded the government with other MPs with similar problems to

drop the top down housing targets that require too much building. I have explained this and urge the Council again to put out a local plan, as this is crucial under the new approach to offering protection to areas we do not want developed. They have failed to do so.

I have helped get more money for potholes. I want to see action using the enlarged road maintenance budget as there is a big rash of potholes.

I have helped get more money for social care, as this was an area in need of more funding.

I have helped get two new SEN schools where we need more provision.

I have offered public advice to the Council to not cut back spending on grounds maintenance and decent proper street cleaning and drain clearing. I have supported continuation of weekly bin collections.

I have helped get a substantial uplift in the main grant to the Council and in the totals including a range of other sources of public money.

It is a new low in Lib Dem propaganda to argue I want sewage dumped in our rivers. The government has set out proposals with the water industry to increase pipe and processing capacity which has to happen to handle increased volumes. In the meantime before the bigger pipes have gone in the choice is between letting the sewage into rivers or it backing up and polluting our roads and homes.

Instead of scaring people about the financial position when they inherited a strong one with £120 million in balances the Council should get on with the task of providing value for money and spending on the peoples priorities. It would be a good idea if next time they hold a consultation they drop or amend their unpopular plan instead of ploughing on with it regardless as they have been doing all too often so far.