

## 70 days to Independence Day

Let's countdown to Independence and get ready to celebrate our exit.

There are only 37 days left when Parliament is in session and able to try to mess up or delay our passage to Independence.

Write to your MP today if they are showing signs of wanting to stop Brexit and remind them of their Manifesto promises and the result of the referendum and General Election.

The government should be discussing how we commemorate one of the great days of UK history, the day we restore an independent self governing democracy to these islands.

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## Parliament cannot be the executive

There are good reasons why governments propose and Parliament approves, improves or rejects. Parliament is well set up to challenge government, hold it to account, modify or remove its more foolish measures. Parliament is not set up to run competing policies, competing budgets and competing legislative programmes. That way chaos lies.

The rules of Parliament give certain advantages to the executive to allow budgets to be set and policies to be pursued. Those who divide up the jobs within the executive have to show they are in charge of the ruling party or governing coalition, and can command the House on big votes. It would not be wise to change all these rules today just because this particular government lost its way on its Brexit negotiations and lost its Agreement by ignoring many of its own usually loyal supporters. If Labour is serious about wanting to run the government in the future it is also not in their interests to create a Parliament which cannot accept government on any sustained and consistent basis.

When I told Parliament last week it is on trial, I meant it. The public are showing their disapproval at the negative approach of Parliament to Brexit and good government. They dislike the failure so far to deliver a good policy in the national interest to fulfil the promises made on Brexit during the referendum and in the 2017 election. These promises were made by both main national parties that hold the bulk of the seats in the Commons.

We have learned a few things over the last week. We now know there are 110 Conservative Eurosceptics – and 8 Remain Conservatives – prepared to defy a 3 line whip against a bad deal and bad policy towards Brexit. We know there are 71 Labour MPs who defy their leader by demanding a second referendum. Mrs May

would be unwise to do a deal with them, the SNP and Lib Dems for a second referendum, as between them they would be fewer MPs than the 110 plus the 10 DUP she would lose over it.

I hear repeatedly there is no majority for leaving without a deal in Parliament. That is clearly right, were Parliament to have an academic motion on that topic. If, however, Parliament wants to stop Brexit without a deal, the only way is Brexit with a deal. No grouping within the Commons has come up with a possible deal that would both be agreeable to the EU and would command a majority of the Commons. It is also no use the Commons voting for some vague proposal if the government, charged with the task of actually negotiating with the EU thinks it undesirable or unachievable. The Commons rightly condemned a very bad deal this week. It has previously legislated to leave. So what then is the deal that could achieve the stated aim of those who want to leave with a deal?

The ERG favours the government tabling a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement as soon as possible. If the EU then agree to negotiate such an FTA after we have left in March this year, the WTO would let us carry on trading on tariff free terms similar to today whilst we sought to finalise an FTA. That looks like the best way forward to leave with a deal.

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## [Sterling strengthens](#)

Parliament votes down the Withdrawal Agreement and sterling strengthens a little against the dollar and the Euro. I have often said I do not think sterling is mainly driven by views on Brexit, but it has been noticeable the absence of comments from the usual suspects. They are doubtless disappointed that sterling has edged up at a time when the only deal on offer has just been voted down.

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## [The EU moves to control taxation](#)

I was pleased to see the EU is moving as planned to set more tax rates and tax policies at the EU level just as I have been predicting. The EU needs to centralise more to back the Euro and to complete its political union. It also underlines why many of us do not want this future for the UK, where we want to vote for those who tax us and have the right to sack them if they displease. As The EU's latest document says, it wants to stop member states offering lower taxes as incentives to businesses or rich individuals. It wants " a fair tax environment for all" which they say only the EU could

guarantee for member states.

The ideas set out in “Towards a more efficient and democratic decision making in EU tax policy” concentrate on removing the ability of a state to veto a tax proposal. The EU also wants to introduce powers for the European parliament in this area. They are keen to press on with a common corporate tax system, VAT, a Financial Transaction Tax and a Digital Services Tax. They claim “co-ordinated EU action in taxation is essential to protect Member State’s revenues”. They claim “In today’s larger, modern and more integrated EU, a purely national approach to taxation no longer works and unanimity is neither a practical nor an effective way of decision making”. They want a standard system of VAT with a single form instead of 28 varieties as at present, and the ability to stop Ireland and others undercutting corporate taxes to attract business.

You cannot be an independent country and have others impose taxes on your citizens and set your budget. The UK is getting out just in time. If we stay in or bind ourselves to their laws after technically leaving we could end up with their new taxes that would damage our businesses and our consumers.

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## [Fixing Universal Credit](#)

Some constituents have sent me copies of a national campaign email wanting the government to stop the roll out of Universal Credit, and expressing worries about it. I am pleased to report that when I visited our local Benefit Centre I was told that introducing it for new claimants had gone smoothly, and the system was liked by both staff and recipients who thought it superior to the multiplicity of benefits with different requirements under the old system. I have had very few constituency cases about it, and no pattern of systemic failures or major issues.

The government is going slowly over transferring existing benefit recipients onto it, and has promised people should not normally lose over it. The government is going to undertake a pilot and is ready to make changes if problems emerge. There has been understandable concern about the speed of receipt of first payments when going on to the system. I have lobbied on this with others, and some improvements have been made. I repeated this wish in the Commons during the Statement his week on UC.

I am also concerned about the treatment of housing costs, understanding that people cannot easily move into a smaller property when the benefit system says they no longer qualify for full rental assistance owing to the size of their home. I also raised this, and will follow up with the Minister who did not give a clear answer.