

Digital radios

There are a few cases of newer technology that is not as good as older technology. I need to mention digital radio.

Like everyone I was made to go out and buy replacement digital radios when they cut off the old broadcasting system. They said they would be better. I was supplied with a digital radio in my most recent car. They are worse than the ones they replaced, as well as being dearer. Nor was it environmentally friendly to have to ditch all the older radios which still worked fine all the time there was a signal for them to pick up.

There are places where my car radio now cuts out in the middle of busy areas because reception is poor. I used to get uninterrupted reception in these locations on the old system. The home radio needs to be switched on two to three times before it will work. It does not give you instant reception with a simple turn on/off button as the old radio did.

There is one room in the house where I cannot get good reception, and can only get some signal by balancing the radio high on a bookcase and adjusting the way it is pointing from time to time. When leaving the garage the car radio repeats itself.

In another room reception varies depending on where a person is in relation to the radio.

Whilst most modern technology is so much better than last century, digital radio is temperamental, poor quality and frustrating to the listener.

Meeting with Thames Valley Chambers of Commerce

On Friday I was the speaker at the Chamber lunchtime meeting. I spoke about the economic prospects, the opportunities for investment in infrastructure, housing, internet services and the digital revolution. I pointed out that many large companies are announcing good increases in profit and cashflow, and could look around to expand UK capacity as in many areas the economy is short of capacity and importing more than it need do as a result.

I was asked questions about how to motivate more young entrepreneurs, how to get more UK businesses to grow from medium sized entrepreneurial successes to large companies, the prospects for Wokingham secondary schools, the main investment needs of the Thames Valley and the odd political question on Brexit and the Scottish referendum. The answers I gave were in line with the

actions and words I have set out on this site in recent weeks.

Questions for the SNP to ponder

When I as a young man was on the losing side in the 1975 referendum on EEC membership, I did not think we should have a second referendum soon afterwards to try again to get us out. Indeed, more than 25 years past before I and others called for referenda on the Euro and the growing political union that the EEC had become. A referendum is designed to answer a question and make a decision for a decent period of time when it is about these fundamental constitutional matters.

The SNP will have time to consider what went wrong with their last case for so called independence, and what has gone wrong for them since that event. At current oil prices, with the rapid run down in oil output, their economic arithmetic needs reworking over what a Scottish budget would look like.

The rest of the UK would clearly insist on an independent Scotland leaving the pound. Being in a currency union requires each part of the Union to underwrite all parts of the Union socially, economically, and the banking system. English, Welsh and Northern Irish taxpayers would no longer be willing to do this for an independent Scotland.

Scotland would be out of the EU whether the UK is still in or out itself. The EU does not wish to encourage separatist movements within EU countries by offering them easy membership. Spain is insistent on this point given its refusal even to allow a referendum in Catalonia. Nor would Scotland as an applicant country be likely to be offered opt outs from the Euro and Schengen, nor a contribution rebate as the UK currently enjoys.

I was interested to read that the SNP now think maybe seeking to join EFTA would be better, so their argument that this is mainly about EU membership has not lasted a couple of days debate about a second referendum.

Movement in EU thinking on Brexit and “populism”

There are signs that more governments on the continent are beginning to realise that the UK is not seeking continued membership of the single market or customs union, and accepts it will have a relationship based on friendship, collaboration, joint working and trade in a wide range of areas

and activities.

Germany now grasps that they need continuing access to the large London financial markets which do so much to help finance continental business as well as to our lucrative car market. French, Dutch, Danish and other farming businesses on the continent do not want to see the quite high tariffs allowed under the otherwise low tariff WTO regime placed against their voluminous exports to us. The more realistic continental politicians see they cannot undertake the type of negotiation they expected. They thought the UK would be begging to stay in the single market, so they could impose requirements over financial contributions and freedom of movement. It is not going to be like that.

A good negotiation for the UK needs to be friendly, straight forward, and with limited requests of the others. Indeed, it is difficult to see that the UK wants anything from the negotiation that the rest of the EU does not want and need more. They need tariff free more than us. They need good access to financial services and banking. They want their many citizens resident in the UK to be able to stay here. They want the UK to continue to make the largest contribution to the European part of the NATO defence activity and budget. The great news is they can have all that if they simply reassure our UK citizens resident on the continent about their status – which they will – and opt for tariff free trade which they would be wise to do in their own interests.

Many are breathing a sigh of relief in the Chancellories of Europe that the Dutch did not give a larger vote to Mr Wilders, and made Mr Rutte the leader of the largest party. However, they would be wise not to be complacent. Mr Rutte lost 8 seats and Mr Wilders gained 5 seats. Mr Rutte had to disrupt the EU's relationship with Turkey to sound more like Mr Wilders in a bid which did swing some voters back according to the polls. In line with the progressive collapse of the Conservative and Labour look alike parties in Euroland owing to their inability to influence main economic policies, the Dutch Labour party had a disastrous election.

The EU without the UK does have to find more tax revenue from the remaining members or cut back its spending. It is curious to see how all those pro EU forces who told us our net contribution was tiny before the referendum are now saying it will leave a nasty hole in EU finances when we are gone. Fortunately they need to agree a new longer term budget around the time we leave, so they can decide as a more homogenous group of countries, mainly in the Euro, how much collective spending and taxing they need for the new circumstances. As they build their more integrated Europe they would probably be wise to ensure it is properly funded, with sufficient cash to send to the poorer regions and countries. Other single currency areas send much more money around their unions as grants than the Euro area does. That, however, is a matter for them, not for us. They will benefit from not having the UK in the room trying to stop any budget increase when they turn to these important matters for their future.

Fairer finding for schools

I along with MPs with similarly placed constituencies urged the Coalition government to narrow the large gap between the money going to schools in some parts of the country and the much smaller sums going to schools in places like West Berkshire and Wokingham. Conservatives were not able to get agreement in coalition, but did put a commitment to fairer funding in the Conservative 2015 Manifesto.

Ministers have since been working on a scheme. This is currently out to consultation. The request for people to write in on the "National Funding Formula" was first issued on 14 December. The closing date is 22 March. I am writing to remind those interested as they might like to send in their thoughts.

I have put the case to Ministers along with other MPs on several occasions. I will be having another meeting with the Secretary of State shortly about it again. The case is very simple. The main cost of education for each pupil is similar around the country, as it is based on teacher pay and other staff wages paid at national rates. Of course there should be extra money for pupils that require more support, and to recognise problems in deprived areas. There also needs to be some recognition of higher property and support costs in expensive parts of the country. The current gap between the highest and lowest funding, at more than 100% of the lowest level, is too great.

I have asked for the introduction of a new system as soon as possible, and for further transitional increases in money whilst we are awaiting a fair funding answer. The total support per pupil needs to be sufficient for decent provision. Individual schools may have other budget problems. If a school is unable to recruit sufficient pupils then its total funding will drop, and that may force it to reduce the number of subject options as it adjusts its teaching numbers to the lesser number of pupils.

In 2014-15 the per pupil funding of English schools ranged from £8595 per head in the City of London to just £3950 in the lowest funded authority. The average was £4550. Wokingham received £4125 and West Berkshire £4367.

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