

The leadership election



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I am all in favour of choice, but a possible offering of 17 candidates or more for Prime Minister creates a muddled field with too many candidates offering a very similar package. The endless launches of new campaigns also takes attention away from those who claim to be front runners, making their task more difficult to be front runners. The MP electorate is proving hard to persuade, showing that the candidates need to come up with better answers to my two fundamental questions for any wannabe leader. How do you get us out cleanly and promptly from the EU, and what is your programme for taking advantage of Brexit with a range of new policies to promote greater prosperity, wider ownership and better public services?

I will not write about all of them, and suspect some of the 17 will decide on reflection not to put in Nomination papers. I have written about two of the four front runners so far. According to Conservative Home Jeremy Hunt leads with a possible 29 MPs in support, Michael Gove and Boris Johnson are joint second with 26 MPs each and Dominic Raab is fourth on 22 MPs. To get into the last two for election by members the top two have got to get around 155 MPs each if the vote is split evenly, or less if one is much more popular than the other amongst MPs. The second placed is likely to have at least a third of the party in support. Today I will say something about Boris Johnson and soon I will also say something about Dominic Raab. Thereafter I will be guided by who seems to be an interesting candidate because of their platform, or because someone is picking up more support.

The MP electorate needs to believe that the winner can deliver Brexit and can rebuild the Conservative vote. Too many candidates are defining the problem as trying to find compromises a Remain Parliament can accept, which Mrs May failed to achieve. They should instead be telling us how they are going to persuade by their actions the big Leave vote that they can and will achieve Brexit. If they cannot do that they will not rebuild the Conservative position.

Boris Johnson is the most popular candidate with the members so far, with many members of the party wishing him to be on their ballot paper. There is a widespread feeling that the court case against him for the Bus figures is an attack on democracy and an unfair diversion. Many like the way he gave voice to Brexit in the referendum and respect him for resigning from the May government when she decided to back the Chequers plan which most Leavers see

as a needless delay and dilution of Brexit. He has reach and appeal to the wider electorate as his Mayoral wins showed that other Conservatives might struggle to achieve. In view of this I asked Boris to send me his statement of why we should vote for him as he had been talking to me about the leadership. His office sent me the following:

“Our next Prime Minister must be someone who can deliver Brexit, unite our Party and, crucially, defeat Labour. Jeremy Corbyn is the single greatest threat to the prosperity of our country and Boris is the man to beat him.

Polls of the public and of labour members repeatedly underline this point and his track record of winning, whether as London mayor or in the referendum, speaks for itself. Added to a positive vision for brexit and the energy and enthusiasm which he has to take forward our economy it is clear he is the right man for the job.”

What do you think of this prospectus?

In order to get more MP support he does have to flesh out how he will get us out of the EU cleanly and quickly, and what new directions he would want for the UK once out. He also needs to deal with his critics about his past alleged gaffes and changes of view.