

The Queen's speech – Conservative Home article

Let's have a Conservative Queen's speech

It is a sobering thought that the Queen's speech on 10 May this year provides the government with the last opportunity to lay out a programme of work that can be up and running by the time of the next election. The two year preoccupation with covid took energy and resources that the government would like to have applied to its central agenda. It needs to show how a post Brexit UK can flourish and prosper, and how Conservative policies can offer hope and success to many people who voted for levelling up. Now is the time to be bold and ambitious for the UK, country and people.

Central to the task is to show how Brexit opens up opportunities and freedoms. We hear there will be legislative space to amend and repeal some of the many rules and laws we have kept from our membership of the EU. At the time they were passed the UK often wanted substantial changes or would have been happier with no EU law at all. We need a strong piece of legislation which shows left to ourselves we can regulate better and legislate less. We want high standards of safety, animal welfare and employment conditions, but we do not need as much economic regulation and limitations on innovation and competition that many prescriptive EU rules entail. Let us have our own data regime, our own system for ensuring medicine safety, our own approach to innovation in farming and the rest that can flow from freedom. The EU Ports regulation, opposed by all UK interested parties, should be repealed.

At the Treasury we need a new framework for economic management. The attempt to tweak the Maastricht framework that delivered us austerity with its controls over debt and deficit has so far not produced a good new approach. I propose the government has two targets. It should pledge to 2% inflation and seek average 2% growth. The government needs to adopt the current Bank inflation target as its own. For all those who think the current inflation is the result of capacity shortages particularly in energy and food it is obvious government needs to take some responsibility and put in policies which expand our domestic supply. Those who think money creation has something to do with it want the Treasury bound in because they sign off on the Quantitative easing that prints the extra cash. The Treasury should want a growth target to drive work across Whitehall seeking to raise productivity and investment to raise the rate. 2% is higher than we achieved over the last decade. The Treasury needs a VAT reform bill to take VAT off things that do not deserve it like domestic energy and to simplify its structure.

The Environment Department needs a bill to stop ultra large foreign trawlers taking too many fish and damaging our fishing grounds. The fishing legislation should include a bigger programme to rebuild a UK fishing fleet of sea going trawlers. The aim should be to catch less overall in UK waters but for many more of the fish caught to be landed in the UK by our own industry. The Agriculture section of the department needs a Food self sufficiency bill. The aim should be to restore the lost market share of home grown fruit and vegetables, meat and dairy, and other temperate products. There needs to be appropriate subsidy for food production, with the emphasis

on promoting more investment in modern machinery, smart farming and glass and polytunnel acres to extend the growing season. The Environment Department needs to understand that the net zero revolution it wants needs plenty more electrical generating capacity and a range of new electrical products that people think are better than the fossil fuel ones they will replace. It needs to work with the Business department to make this practical and popular.

The Business department needs to major on more domestic energy production. It may need a bill to simplify and clarify current regulatory approaches. The Bill should include all necessary powers to allow landowners and local communities to participate in the turnover or profits of onshore gas, oil and mineral extractions. No-one should be made to have these, but all should be eligible for incentives so we do produce more. The Energy department has revealed that using our own gas brings a big cut in carbon dioxide emissions compared to imported LNG which adds to the case to get on with it. Using our own means more money for local communities and an avalanche of extra tax revenue for the state. The more we import the more energy tax we send abroad.

The Health department needs to concentrate on getting value for all that extra cash put into it. The NHS needs more doctors, nurses, treatments and appointments, but it needs fewer quangos, chief executives and complex trust structures. It could do with a more precise safety and reporting regime. The social care policy development has concentrated on payment and financial responsibility. We also need to consider the quality of care and the balance of options for those who need it. These matters mainly need better management, following recent legislation. It is likely, however, that the government will need more powers in the jungle of semi independent bodies to try to find a way through. Getting waiting lists down is a central priority. For too many people needing care and treatment but not needing emergency care they face a long wait. A short Bill with essential measures to help create more health capacity and to offer sufficient choices for those in need of long term care may be needed.

The Welfare department has a recently remodelled scheme for the main benefit, Universal Credit. It has had to suspend for one year the promised triple lock for the State retirement pension. It needs to ensure going forward the pension is fair and reflects the pledge, with just the extreme of earnings growth in recovery year smoothed out. For Universal Credit there may need to be further changes to make it even more worthwhile to work, and there may need to be other changes to make it easier for people to get jobs from welfare. There is joint work to be done with Housing to help people where homelessness or poor housing gets in the way of getting a job.

The government believes in the Union. The Northern Ireland Protocol is a threat to both the Union and to the Good Friday Agreement. The government must legislate to instruct our customs officials that goods bound from GB to Northern Ireland will pass with no additional checks under our own domestic system of control. The legislation should assure the Republic and EU that we will police the traders to ensure none of these products are sent on to the Republic.

The Trade department may need legislation to implement the various trade deals that are now being negotiated at pace with places around the world. Our own trade system should be streamlined further to reduce border delays.

Much of the work that needs to be done is in securing better value and more purpose from the huge sums in the budgets. Levelling up will need billions of private sector investment and sufficient freedoms and opportunities for many people who want to get on in the world from modest backgrounds. This requires a low tax pro enterprise society. It needs a can do attitude from government to show everyone what can be done by being positive. Government needs to trust the people more and resort to rule making less. This Queen's speech needs to set that tone.
