

My Interventions in the Energy Bill

(1)

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

On that very point—security—what provision is being made for days when there is no wind, given that we will see the closure of most of our nuclear power stations this decade and will have little else to rely on, other than fossil fuel? How are we going to get through?

Andrew Bowie, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Nuclear and Networks:

My right hon. Friend knows that I am a great champion of supporting our oil and gas industry, which continues to supply a large amount of our energy baseload and will do for a significant amount of time to come. As he also knows, we are investing a lot of time and money into ensuring that we deliver the next generation of nuclear power plants, including small modular reactors, so that we have the energy baseload that this country needs so that, as he rightly suggests, when the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine, people can still be assured that the lights will come on. The Conservative principles that I have spoken about are at the very heart of the Bill, which I am pleased to bring before the House today.

It is true that some time has passed since the Bill was introduced in July last year. The Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), was but a boy when this Bill was introduced last year. A huge amount of constructive dialogue and dedicated Toggle showing location ofColumn 275work has taken place during that time. I thank all the Secretaries of State at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Ministers and the Prime Ministers who have been involved since the Bill was introduced.

Since the Bill came to this House from the other place, I have met and engaged with colleagues from all sides of House. We debated the Bill in a lively Second Reading and spent 72 long hours in Committee, so I start by thanking everyone across the House, especially the shadow ministerial team, the former Scottish National party energy spokesman, the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), and all on the Government side, for their constructive engagement in ensuring that we got the Bill to these final stages in a state that, I hope, will be broadly welcomed by most, if not all, Members.

My Interventions in the Energy Bill

(4)

I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting this issue to all in the House. I hope that the Government will take urgent action to get rid of it, because it is completely unacceptable. It also shows how little time we have to discuss fundamental issues.

My right hon. Friend has put his finger exactly on the pulse. This is a substantial Bill. I say to the Minister that I hope the Government will strip out criminal penalties for not adhering to unknown net zero certification, EPCs and all the rest of it in the future for something as simple as not complying with some of these net zero regulations. This is really serious. I hope that when the Bill returns to the other end of the Palace, consideration can be given to strip out such proposals.

I could have gone on at huge length this afternoon. I tabled many amendments because these are overweening powers trying to push and nudge us and to ban things. All I can imagine is that the Chinese embassy will be looking at the Bill with great enthusiasm, as it will drive even more of our high-energy businesses offshore. China will be pleased that it will be able to sell us more solar panels and wind turbines based on its steel, produced on the back of very cheap coal power. That is what we are doing here: driving our high-energy businesses offshore. This is not a recipe for energy security; this is a recipe for energy disaster.

I could talk at length about what is wrong with the net zero proposals banning cars, banning oil boilers, banning this and banning that. That is not what we do as Conservatives. We actually allow freedoms. We allow the market to decide. The Bill goes in the wrong direction.

My Interventions in the Energy Bill

(3)

John Redwood:

Does my right hon. Friend accept, on the cost argument, that we also need to build a new gas turbine station as back-up for when the wind does not blow?

Sir Alok Sharma:

We do need a diversified energy system, and I think the Minister set out all the work that is going on on nuclear, for example. However, as we drive forward for greater energy security, we need to change the planning rules to

allow more onshore wind. The objectives of new clause 43 are to ensure a more permissive planning regime. The new clause seeks to lift the current planning restriction that in effect means that a single objection can block a development. It also seeks to ensure that local communities willing to take onshore wind developments will receive direct community benefits.

The Government have today responded to new clause 43 by bringing forward a written ministerial statement on onshore wind. I thank the Government for the constructive dialogue we have had over the past days on this issue. I acknowledge that that written ministerial statement, and indeed the accompanying changes to the national planning policy framework, move things forward and will help to deliver a more permissive planning regime for onshore wind.

The de facto ban is lifted. The statement clarifies that the policy intent is not to allow very limited objections or even a single objection to ban a planning application, and it is explicit that local communities willing to host onshore wind farms should directly benefit, including potentially through energy discounts. That is positive, but we do need to see the Government's formal response to their consultation on this issue to understand the detail of the precise mechanism by which the benefits regime will work. Toggle showing location of Column 291

I also welcome the fact that local plans will not be the only route to delivering more onshore wind, with more agile and targeted routes available. Of course it is now a requirement for local planning authorities to support community-led initiatives for renewable and low-carbon energy. Vitally, those policy changes are effective today.

[My Speech on the Energy Bill](#)

John Redwood (Wokingham, Conservative):

The wish to carry through a great electrical revolution will require a lot of good will from the British people. My worry about this legislation is that it may antagonise them by being unduly restrictive, particularly with the threat of civil and even criminal penalties on some of their conduct. We need to persuade people that the green products will be cheaper, better, more acceptable and make a more general contribution, and not try to bamboozle them. I hope that there will be an opportunity to vote on the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay) to get rid of the threat of criminal and civil penalties over the issue of a proper transition.

For things to take off, the products—the heat pumps and the electric cars—will have to be much more popular. More people will have to believe in their specifications and adequacy, and they will have to be more affordable.

I, for example, would be very happy to have a heat pump to heat my rather small London flat, but I am told that there is not one available because I am not allowed to adorn the outside of the block of flats with any of the things that a person would need to make a heat pump system work. There must be practical solutions to these problems. We cannot force the pace by legislation; the markets and the investment have to catch up.

My second worry about this legislation is that energy policy has to achieve three things at the same time. Yes, we have to take considerable environmental issues into account, but we also need affordable energy and we need available energy. In recent years, all main parties have put so much emphasis in their policy making on the environmental that we are missing the obvious, which is that we are no longer guaranteeing security of supply. We cannot guarantee security of supply if we are mainly relying on wind farms. We cannot rely on solar on a dark winter evening when people want to cook their meal and turn the heating up, because there is no solar. We have to look at the relative costs. The unit cost of energy generated by a wind farm that is already built is very cheap on one costing system, but if we have a gas turbine system that is non-operational for most of the time, only kicking in occasionally when the wind does not blow, that is part of the cost of the delivery of the wind power and it is a far more expensive way of running gas turbines than if we use them all the time.

Craig Mackinlay, (Member for South Thanet, Conservative):

My right hon. Friend is making an excellent point about the extra energy provision that we need to make renewables work. Has he considered the true environmental cost of the batteries, the digging up of cobalt by children in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the smelting and all the rest of it? That is the real cost of relying on renewables, and we hear very little about the real cost of the batteries.

John Redwood:

I am greatly in favour of doing proper, whole-life carbon accounting, taking into account all the CO₂ generated by making the green product—its lifetime use, on which it may be better, and its disposal, on which it may be worse. It is certainly the case that if we acquire an electric vehicle that has generated a lot of CO₂ in its production and then we do not drive it very much, we will have not a CO₂ gain but a CO₂ loss, so there must be realistic carbon accounting. We also should not fall for the national fallacy that is built into the international system. For example, we could say that we have brought our CO₂ down because we are importing things, but that actually generates a lot more CO₂ than had we done it for ourselves.

This is the essence of the argument about our own gas. If we get more of our own gas down a pipe, it produces a fraction of the CO₂ for the total process than if we import liquefied natural gas having had to use a lot of energy compressing and liquefying the gas, a lot of energy switching it back, and a lot of energy on long-distance sea transport. Therefore, we must be realistic in the CO₂ accounting.

Finally, I do not think that the Bill is giving us much guidance. For example, if the electrical revolution does take off, because the really popular products arrive and people find them affordable, how will they get the power delivered to their homes? We are already told that many wind farms cannot be started or cannot be connected to the grid any time soon. There needs to be a massive expansion of grid capacity and a big digging-up of roads and re-cabling of Britain. If my constituents are all to adopt an electric car and a heat pump, we need a massive expansion both of electricity generation and of grid capacity. I do not see that happening at the moment. There need to be market reactions and proper investment plans, and this legislation is not helping.

I fear that this Bill adds to the costs. It adds targets that could turn out to be unrealistic and that could be self-defeating, because quite often the actions taken to abate CO2 end up generating more CO2 at the world level and mean that we have exported an awful lot of crucial business that we would be better off doing here.

[A bad Energy bill Conservative Home article](#)

Over the last week there has been a big row about the state of some school buildings. More than thirty years ago various local Education Authorities and schools built some facilities using a porous type of cement. Subsequently there has been professional advice made public that this material can fail after a few decades of use. All professionals involved with building construction and maintenance have known that if they are responsible for any such buildings they need to be regularly checked, strengthened if there are signs of deterioration or replaced in serious cases.

A worried Minister and senior officials in the Department for Education were concerned at the lack of actions over these buildings and so sent round a questionnaire, drawing attention to the issue and seeking to find out what was going on. The law provides for local responsibilities under the devolved framework for education.. The Local Education Authorities and the Governors and senior managers of the state schools are responsible for the upkeep and safety of their buildings. Where an LEA school has subsequently become an Academy Trust the responsibility switched to the Trust though the Trust may well expect the LEA to assist where it took over buildings that contained this concrete without a proper disclosure by the LEA.

It is a bizarre row that the Opposition are making, saying it is for the government to reveal its list of schools with problems, when the government's Information comes from the schools and the schools have to follow up and remedy the issues. Surely the burden of disclosure rests with the LEAs and the schools who must know which schools are at risk and what they are doing about. The big majority of schools can today put on social

media a simple statement they have none of this concrete. The ones that do have it should put out a fuller statement saying how they have handled the issue and if there are any consequences for lessons next week. Ministers have not visited most of these schools and do not know the condition of the buildings. They do not control the maintenance budgets and contracts. The whole idea of localism is to get these kind of decisions taken by people on the spot who work or visit the buildings regularly and understand the issues. Ministers can of course as they did in this case highlight possible problems for local Councils and institutions to resolve, but Ministers should be careful not to assume control and with it responsibility. What is the point of all the cost and personnel involved in local government and school government if they do not even mend the roof?

The government is generally in danger of trying to do much and intervening too often, often at great expense. The Energy Bill is another good example. This Bill sets out a course for large scale spending on carbon capture and storage. This will need to be highly subsidised, or if charged to customers will be a further ratchet in the UK's high energy prices, forcing more UK industry to close and more imports to replace it. The idea behind carbon capture is if money is spent harvesting CO₂ and storing it in old gas wells the UK could burn a bit more fossil fuel in the knowledge that the extra CO₂ that produced will be taken out of the air by the carbon storage system.

There are several problems with this idea. If other countries do not do the same the UK is left with dearer energy. We will make less and import more. World CO₂ volumes will increase by at least all the extra CO₂ long haul transport from abroad for the goods may generate, and may increase further because for example the goods come from China still burning a lot of coal in its energy mix. The extra costs will in the first instance attract substantial government subsidies and spending, putting more upwards pressure on interest rates and limiting the scope for tax cuts. If at the same time as putting in carbon storage the government continues to run down UK produced gas and imports more LNG that will also raise CO₂ output worldwide as LNG generates so much more CO₂ than North Sea gas down a pipe.

It is a bad idea that the UK should allocate £20 billion spending to this technology before competitors agree to adopt it and at a time when total public spending is too high. The Energy Bill contains other interventions that will damage UK business and cost too much. The government is wrong to take heavy handed powers to make people insulate their homes or adopt particular heating and transport technologies. The market is best placed to develop great green products. Like smartphones and on line shopping green products will sell themselves when they cut our energy bills and give us a better life. Create a good framework for setting up and growing a business, with lower taxes to attract corporate investment. That would progress the green revolution better than hundreds of pages of restrictive regulation, windfall taxes and imposition on individuals.

Governments can try to do too much. When it tries to back winners it often finds losers apply for the money. When it tells people what to do and what to buy it builds up their resentment and is often self defeating. When government seeks to cut carbon dioxide output in the UK it usually boosts it globally by requiring CO₂ heavy imports. When it seeks to help devolved governments and institutions who have not sort out their own

problems it just ends up taking the blame for their failings. The government should learn from the bad misjudgment of the Mayor of London to tax older vans and cars, leading to a rush of lawbreaking with many attacks on much hated cameras.