

New Year's message

2018 teems with opportunity.

Technology is driving amazing change. Robotics, artificial intelligence, social media and the internet are the children of today's digital age. They offer us scope to achieve more, understand more, relate to each other better. They offer the UK the chance to be a digital pioneer and a global exploiter of the scope for positive change these ideas allow.

The UK is well set to be a leader of the knowledge based businesses that are the hallmark of the digital world. With world class universities, a capacity to set up small businesses easily and quickly, with flexible entrepreneurial people and a willingness to experiment, the UK can prosper from innovation.

Restoring our ability to govern ourselves and to provide the legal and social framework we need to succeed in this exciting era is part of our mission for 2018 into 2019. Brexit offers us scope to grow more of our own food, to control our own fishery, to make laws that support and help entrepreneurs whilst ensuring high standards, and to develop our global role with Agreements and Treaties as we see fit. The UK will return to the top tables in areas like Trade, the Environment and business regulation, expressing views and helping shape the global standards that increasingly dominate.

Across the Atlantic the Republicans in Congress are aiming to speed their economic growth and to make the USA a magnet for investment by lowering tax rates. This will provide a welcome boost to world activity, and act as a reminder of the need to set competitive tax rates to allow jobs to grow and prosperity to flourish.

The world is a better place for less military intervention in the Middle East by the western powers, and for the planned withdrawal of Russia from Syria. It will not of itself stop all the Middle Eastern civil and religious strife, but it will remove some of the complications in the conflicts. I would like to see a period of relative peace when the west turns swords into helpful robots. We can help transform the world by economic growth, technology and greater investment.

I wish you all a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

What a Guest editor of the Today programme could do for the audience

Prince Harry did well setting out his causes and campaigns as Guest editor of

the Today programme. He made good use of his slot.

The choice of some of the other Guest editors has left a feeling that the whole week is yet again unbalanced, and designed to prevent any Guest Editor being appointed who might try to shine light on topics and viewpoints the BBC prefers to ignore or criticise.

Here's a few that might make for good radio.

1. A piece on why and how the economic establishments of the Treasury, IMF, World Bank and others could be so wrong in their economic forecasts of the consequences of the Exchange Rate Mechanism, the big build up of credit and derivatives prior to 2008, and the short term impact of the Brexit vote on the UK economy. This could include interviews with representatives of the handful of experts who did get all three of these big issues right.
2. A piece on security and price of energy, and the impact EU and UK policies have had on both this century. Can the needs of plentiful and cheap energy to deal with fuel poverty, keep people warm and ensure a decent manufacturing base be reconciled with other policy objectives? Is current US or EU energy policy more helpful to the world economy?
3. A piece on whether the Trump Administration is serious about promoting peace by means other than constant military interventions in the Middle East, and whether the consequences of less military involvement over the last year have been better or worse than the Bush/Obama wars
4. A piece on the damage high taxes can do, and an examination of when and how revenue increases when rates are cut
5. A piece on what is a reasonable rate of migration to allow the provision of decent accommodation, school places, health care and the rest to the new arrivals and the settled communities they join.

[The Today programme condemns populism](#)

I had hoped with Guest editors the Today programme would seek to reconnect for just a day or two with the taxpayers, motorists and Eurosceptics it regularly castigates the rest of the year. I should have known better. This morning they have just given an interview with an "expert" who told them that people voting for "populist" parties threatened the underpinnings of liberal democracy in Europe. So there we have it. People voting against the EU and Euro establishment in their countries are anti democratic forces. Why wasn't the expert asked why in the EU you are only allowed to vote for what the Establishment thinks is right? Why do voters have to vote again when they get the answer to referendums wrong according to the Establishment? What should voters do when traditional parties remain wedded to Euro austerity policies?

Euro papers withheld

There's a surprise! The release of government documents includes delays to the release of European Exchange Rate Mechanism papers and a block on the release of certain Euro papers relating to 1992 when we dropped out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. This was the biggest economic policy error of the last quarter of the twentieth century in the UK. The Establishment and main political parties united to visit this disaster on us. It led to falling house prices, a big rise in unemployment, closed factories, bankrupt businesses, all in the name of European integration. The irony is it delivered what Project Fear wrongly said our vote to leave the EU would deliver in the winter of 2016-17! No wonder the Remain establishment is shy about revealing more of what happened then.

Personal travel

I was surprised by the way several contributors misread yesterday's post. It was a piece about how technology and changing lifestyles might affect personal transport in the future. It was not an attack upon personal choice or on the motorist. Use of a car is essential for most people today to get them to work or their children to school or to go to the shops. It is only in large cities like London where public transport offers a frequent and flexible service that more people find it practical to do without owning a car.

The government does need to do more to improve road safety and reduce congestion. I have sought to show how these twin aims can be mutually reinforcing and need not be in conflict in the way some suggest.

Short term and relatively cheap options include permitting and encouraging more off road parking, optimising phasing on traffic lights, creating segregated right hand turning lanes, and creating more pavements and cycleways away from main vehicle carriageways.

Dearer options include bypasses, more bridges over railway lines and rivers which act as barriers cutting road capacity especially into towns and cities.

The highways authorities need to offer safer and better solutions for school set down and pick up instead of encouraging parking on busy roads close to schools at peak times of day. They need to use more roundabouts and fewer light sets. They should require replacement and new utility pipes and cables to be laid away from the main highway in accessible conduits to stop the need

to dig up the road for maintenance and replacement.

The government is asking each Highways authority to identify and improve a local strategic road network. This is a good initiative with money for suitable improvement projects.