

Cabinet briefings

I agree with the Chancellor about one thing. It is best if private conversations around the Cabinet table remain private. Every member should be able to put their case, and all come out telling us what was agreed. If we learn about everything that is said it makes it more difficult for Cabinet to consider awkward issues or unpopular views.

There seem to be two main arguments underway which are now the stuff of media speculation. There is the argument about public sector pay and spending levels. There is another argument about the nature of Brexit.

The pay round is now well advanced. The government did set guidance of a 1% overall payrise for the public sector. Individual Pay Review bodies can propose more in the light of supply/demand circumstances, current levels of pay and standards of living, comparability with other groups and the rest. Government is likely to accept the recommendations of the Review Bodies. I have suggested government give more consideration to productivity based deals where employees receive something for something, more money for working smarter. Government has plenty of scope to help employees work smarter with more technology back up and better training.

The issue of Brexit is meant to have been settled. The government reached a common position for the Article 50 letter and the White Paper. Apparently there are arguments about a transitional deal. We are still 20 months away from leaving, plenty of time to do a proper deal about our future relationship. Surely you would only consider an implementation phase near the end if there really are problems that will take a bit longer to work out. It will be no easier negotiating a transitional agreement than an agreement, so lets get on with the real thing.

There need be no cliff edge without an agreement. We know how WTO operates and what it looks like. There is plenty of time to put in place the landing rights, customs checks and the rest for continued EU trade. We should be doing that just in case there is no deal.

More money for Wokingham and West Berkshire schools

I was pleased today that the Secretary of State announced £1300 million more for English schools across 2018-19 and 2019-20. I had been pressing her and the Treasury hard to make more money available in total for schools, as had others.

She went on to explain that “we are able to increase the percentage allocated to pupil led factors and this formula settlement to 2019-20 will provide at least £4,800 per pupil for every secondary school”. Again I with others had pressed for more of the money to be granted as a per pupil payment so that Councils like Wokingham and West Berkshire would benefit fully.

The government is still planning on introducing a fairer funding formula for 2018-19 and beyond. For the first two years the “national funding formula will set indicative budgets for each school” but “local authorities will continue to set a local formula as they do now for determining individual schools budgets in 2018-19 and 2019-20.” The details of the new national formula will be set out in September.

I will follow up with the Secretary of State on the detail of the formula as I am keen to see a decent result for local schools.

In the EU we did not have any Parliamentary control over new EU laws

What a nonsense this row is about so called Henry VIII clauses.

All our current EU laws either were imposed direct with no reference at all to Parliament, or had to be voted through as Statutory Instruments in order to comply. Thousands of EU laws became our laws with no opportunity for Parliament to debate and vote on them as draft Acts of Parliament. Parliament was warned it could not vote down SIs that were needed to implement Directives, and an alliance of the two main front benches ensured they always passed.

Now Parliament is debating at great length transferring all these laws into UK laws by a full Act of Parliament. Thereafter if we wish to change any of them we will be able to do so, but again it will take a full Act of Parliament to do so. That is the restoration of the democratic control we voted for.

Because the draft Act says Ministers for a 2 year period may make technical adjustments so these laws still work in the way intended once they are UK law by passing a Statutory Instrument Labour is wrongly saying this is not democratic.

The power will only be used for technical changes like striking out reference to other member states in what becomes a UK law, or substituting a UK's court or other body to adjudicate or act where an EU institution does at the moment. Parliament will still be involved as any Statutory Instrument can be debated and voted on if the Opposition wishes.

It is embarrassing to hear and see so much airtime given over to this non

story. Why did we never hear about the complete absence of democracy for all those laws the EU imposed on us? Why was it right to allow SIs for major changes to our law when it came from the EU, yet it is not even allowed to use SIs for technical changes to keep the purpose and effectiveness of the inherited EU law?

Let's stop negotiating with ourselves

There are endless discussions in some of the media and in Parliament about what concessions the UK should offer. Why don't they understand the negotiations may go on for 19 more months? The EU has not yet made a sensible offer or explained how it wishes to maintain full tariff free access to our market with no new barriers. Why do they keep on recycling the same old stale stories, and the same old failed lines from the Remain campaign?

Some people are in danger once again of mistaking media noise for change of policy. The government's policy of Brexit was clearly laid out in the Article 50 letter, the supporting Act of Parliament, Lancaster House speech and White Paper. It is not changing. It is now embodied in the EU Withdrawal Bill.

If the media had any interest in news rather than olds they would go off and interview the other member states about their negotiating aims and their attitudes towards the EU approach so far. They would go and ask German car companies, French dairy farmers, Dutch market gardeners, Danish pig farmers and the rest what they want the EU to achieve on the trade front.

There is no need to offer the EU any money over and above our legal obligations. If you have to pay to trade the cheapest way is to adopt WTO tariffs, and then negotiate away the tariffs with countries outside the EU to get us even better access to their markets and to cut import prices. If you had to pay a fixed up front sum to trade related to the volume of your trade they would be paying us more than we pay them, which is extremely unlikely. We are offering them free access to our market.

The UK voters were very clear when they voted to take back control. Taking control of our money was the central feature of the Vote Leave campaign. There are plenty of good uses for that £12bn net saving. It would be a good idea if the media had a few interviews with interested parties on how we should spend that money, or whether we should give some back to taxpayers.

There is no sign of the government weakening its line on the money, as the Foreign Secretary has recently made clear in his vivid if unorthodox language.

Brexit and sloppy journalism

Some newspapers and BBC commentators, led by the Evening Standard seem to think everything revolves around Brexit if it is negative. They either avoid the positive or dismiss it as happening despite Brexit.

It has become a lazy habit of mind. Since Brexit, if the pound goes down, it is because of Brexit. When the pound goes up they tend to ignore it. After Brexit they delighted in the short sharp markdown of the Stock Market. When the strong upwards move commenced in the FTSE100 they said they had not meant the FTSE 100, the larger stocks, but had meant the FTSE250 which more accurately captures the domestic economy. When that too surged they switched to another topic.

They quietly dropped their recession forecasts for last winter, and tiptoe round the excellent jobs figures which have continued to show good new job generation throughout the post Brexit vote year. Instead they shifted their forecasts from recession to slowdown, and shifted the date from soon to later.

Using their methods I should be arguing that since the Brexit vote the Stock market is up sharply, showing improved confidence in our future prospects. I should point out that business has given a resounding vote of confidence in post Brexit UK in the most positive way possible, by hiring many more staff. I would point to the continuing very high levels of inward investment, to the growth in new housing being built and sold , and to high levels of consumption as all marvels of the vote. There we have it – the Brexit vote has brought us more jobs, more homes, more inward investment, more business confidence. The main complaint I now have from anti Brexit business is a worry they will not be able to recruit all the labour they need in future. In other words they plan to stay here and invest and grow here.

I do not do so because I think the impact of Brexit is exaggerated. Just as joining the EEC and then the single market did nothing to raise our growth rate – indeed it went down – so leaving the EU will have little economic impact. What it will do is important politically, giving us the power back to shape our own destiny and have a better economic future if we wish to make the changes necessary to bring that about.