

My Intervention on the Ministerial Statement- Work Capability Assessment Consultation

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

I strongly support the initiative to help more people who are long-term sick and disabled into work where they wish to do that. My query is: why on earth is it going to take so long? We need to be doing this now, to ease our workplace shortages and to give those people earlier support and hope. Will my right hon. Friend please work with his officials to speed it all up?

Mel Stride, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions:

I share my right hon. Friend's keenness to see these proposals—whatever may or may not emerge—come forward as soon as possible. They will require a lot of work on IT systems and changes to systems. The providers will have to incorporate the changes that may or not come forward as a result of this consultation. Let me reassure him that, given the benefits there will be to many people who will otherwise not benefit from work, I am as anxious as he is to make sure that we move forward at speed.

My Interventions in the Energy Bill (2)

John Redwood (Wokingham, Conservative):

If this electrical revolution is to take off, many more people will need to buy electric cars and heat pumps. Does the hon. Gentleman have any advice for the Government on how those items can be made more popular and more affordable?

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Labour):

The Government and I have been in considerable discussion about precisely that point. We need to make sure we change the model of ownership of those devices. We perhaps need to have a longer debate about that on another occasion.

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.