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 CO 2 output worldwide as LNG generates so much more CO 2 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 busines 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 themselevs 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 CO 2 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.

My Intervention in the Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete in Education Settings Ministerial Statement

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

Will individual schools have direct access to the money and the temporary accommodation, if they need it? And will every local education authority make an urgent statement about their role in commissioning the schools in the first place and about maintenance, where they are responsible?

Gillian Keegan, Secretary of State for Education:

We have put a caseworker in place so that each school can work with that caseworker, as well as having access to the temporary accommodation and the company that can do the propping work, which we have already secured, or to additional surveying, if required. We are working closely with local authorities, but I urge the 5% of local authorities that have not responded

to the questionnaire to respond—that is more important than ever.

The Energy Bill

Last night just 19 of us voted against the Energy Bill. The Bill was supported by Labour, SNP, Lib Dems , and the Green MP. These parties tried to amend it to stop UK oil and gas earlier and to increase the costs on UK business more. The Conservative government voted these unhelpful amendments down with large majorities but stuck with a Bill which intervenes too much with people's preferences and with an energy market already distorted by windfall taxes, subsidies and complex rules.

We had too little time to debate it as the united parties stuck with a timetable motion that allowed backbenchers around just 2 hours to discuss 426 pages of law and 146 amendments. Because there were 6 votes there was no time for any debate on Third reading which would have provided chance to review the Bill as amended.

In my time restricted remarks I stressed the need to carbon account more realistically. As energy policy is driven by net zero rather than by affordability and availability it is important to count carbon sensibly. It makes no sense for the UK to tax and price and regulate the end of high CO 2 activities here if we simply import the high energy goods from somewhere else adding to world CO 2 totals. It makes no sense to dump your petrol car early to buy an electric car if you do not do a high mileage as the CO 2 generated by making the EV and destroying the petrol car will be greater than the savings in use. When looking at CO 2 outcomes you cannot assume all UK electricity is green when we often generate more than half from gas. When assessing the electrical revolution you need to include all the CO 2 generated by making steel for new pylons, by smelting new copper for cables, making new bitumen to repair the roads after digging them up to put in cables, all the CO 2 in mining the materials for batteries and fabricating them.

How is the Energy and net zero policy going to work?

I did not vote for the Climate Change Act of 2008. I was critical of the lack of costings and forecasts of what would be needed to undertake such a fundamental change of the energy we used and the ways we used it. No one

proposing it could tell us what technologies would work and would be needed to decarbonise diets, aviation, heavy plant, industry and home heating.

This week I am unable to support the government’s latest essay in energy policy geared to hitting the net zero targets. The Bill continues the development of a complex web of subsidies, windfall taxes, price controls and regulations that run the risk of imposing dear energy on us. The UK seems to think cutting our CO 2 output by closing factories and steel works here is good for the planet when importing these items will add to world CO 2.

I am concerned about the UK spending an estimated £20 bn on carbon capture and storage. This is all extra cost which will either be paid for by taxpayers through subsidies or by energy users through higher prices. Either way it is bad for inflation, jobs and business here in the UK .

The UK should not be putting our own energy using businesses or our domestic consumers at a disadvantage. The UK does not have to pioneer carbon capture before other far larger CO 2 producers like China and the EU get around to using carbon capture.