

A reply to constituents concerned about Brexit and wanting a second referendum

Thank you for your email concerning Brexit options. Trying to represent any constituency when opinions are so divided on this important matter is not easy. Clearly an MP has to express one view and cast one vote in any matter to be settled, whilst his constituents have a range of views. In order to come to a judgement I take the following things into account

1. The promises I made in my own Manifesto to my voters at the last General Election, and the promises made by my party in that Election unless I expressly disagreed with them at the time
2. The recommended course of action laid down by the Conservative whip. People elected me to support a Conservative government, so I normally vote with that government. They also voted me in to exercise some independent judgement, which I am willing to do when I think that government is wrong.
3. The balance of opinion within my constituency, judged from my email box, website contributions and my conversations with constituents. I often reinforce this by announcing a consultation and encourage people to write in. I also look at national opinion polling which often reflects changes of moods in Wokingham.
4. My judgement of the issue based on experience and knowledge, with a mind to what will be the best outcome for constituents

I do not take into account my own interests, which are irrelevant when exercising the power of voice and vote held as MP, which is held on behalf of the community I represent.

There are now various options being proposed as to how to proceed with the EU. The immediate question relates to Mrs May's draft Withdrawal Agreement with the EU. I have consulted very widely on this and also have made my own judgement about the wider interest of Wokingham and the nation. It is clear that this Agreement does not suit Leave voters, who do not think it represents what they voted for, nor does it suit a substantial number of Remain voters who rightly worry about leaving us without vote and voice in the EU whilst being partially in it. I therefore oppose this Agreement. Until the government either rejects this Agreement or puts it to a vote in the Commons, it will not be possible for the government to explore other options on how to proceed or for Parliament to vote on such options backed up by government legislation to enact them.

I therefore intend to continue to argue that we need to vote down the Withdrawal Agreement soon, to enable us to think of other ways forward. The Conservative party and the Prime Minister do not favour a second referendum, and we did not include any such proposal in our Manifesto. In order to understand the case for one better I would appreciate it if you could tell me

what the question should be in any such vote. It does not seem to me to be much point in putting Mrs May's Withdrawal Agreement to a public vote when it looks as if it is opposed by a large majority of MPs. If we had a referendum on Mrs May's Agreement or staying in Leave voters would feel their option was excluded, and if Mrs May's Agreement won there would still be difficulties in getting it through the Commons unless Labour then agreed to back it. If we had a re run of Leave or Remain the vote would not necessarily resolve the Parliamentary logjam created by the last referendum on that topic and would lead to demands for a third referendum were Leave to lose.

There are no easy answers when Parliament remains so divided on this issue.