

# Universal Credit

I attended the debate on Wednesday 17 October. I have lobbied the government to ensure people in need do not lose out from the transition to Universal Credit, and to encourage them to be more generous with benefits for the disabled. As the Secretary of State made clear in the House, and as the government statements which I published on Wednesday confirms, they are improving the scheme. It will pay more to most disabled people than the old scheme. They will roll it out gradually, making improvements as they go if new issues arise.

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## The government has to understand there is no deal on offer from the EU

The government says it wants a deal. It means by this it wants an all embracing agreement on the future relationship including a free trade deal within it. The Opposition says the government must have an agreement, whilst making it clear it will seek to vote down the kinds of agreement the PM has in mind. All this is an irrelevance. The EU has been clear and consistent throughout. All it is offering is a one sided surrender Agreement or Withdrawal Treaty. Its main aim is to sign the UK up to this to take £39bn off us which they are not entitled to unless the UK is foolish enough to sign such an Agreement. Only if the UK signs up to such a damaging idea will they then discuss the details of a Future Partnership Agreement.

There are several good reasons why the UK must not sign any Withdrawal Agreement before we leave on March 29th 2019. We will leave in accordance with the two laws Parliament has passed to do so, unless Parliament repeals or amends those laws which this government assures us it will not do.

First, the UK will have no bargaining clout at all once we have signed the Withdrawal Agreement. The main thing they want is the money. If we also throw in accepting all their rules and regulations for another 21 months or longer, they have no incentive to move on or to make a decent offer.

Second, we need to spend that money at home on our priorities. That was one of the main reasons many of us voted for Brexit. A government which promised in its Manifesto to implement Brexit and take back control must not give the money away again.

Third, the UK needs to get on with implementing a fishing and farming policy that is good for home production and for our environment. We cannot stay another 21 months or longer in the CAP and CFP, as they are very damaging to us.

Fourth, the UK needs to put in place its own migration and benefits policies, as promised by the government following the Referendum

Fifth, we need to respond positively to the many offers of Free Trade Agreements from other countries, which we could not do if stay locked in the Customs Union.

Those who think there is an Agreement to be had need to come clean and accept that as far as the EU is concerned the only thing on offer before we leave is a penal Withdrawal Agreement. There is nothing in the draft of that Agreement that guarantees something better in a possible Future Partnership Agreement.

As the government has failed to table a free trade agreement during the 2 years 4 months they have so far been negotiating, accepting the EU false sequencing of the talks, there will not be one on offer before March 2019. We must therefore just leave, and then table one the day we leave and see what happens. The reality of us leaving without signing a Withdrawal Agreement is the best way to a Free Trade Agreement in reasonable time. Otherwise the EU will continue delaying and they will be laughing all the way to the bank to pay our large contributions in. There is no cliff edge, and trade will continue after March 29th. It's more imports than exports, and the UK will not stop the food and medicines coming in to our ports which will by then be completely under our control.

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## More money for social care for Wokingham and West Berkshire

Earlier this month, the Health and Social Care Secretary announced £240 million for the social care system over winter, giving councils a significant boost to prevent people from going into hospital unnecessarily and getting them home as soon as they are ready.

This funding will ease pressure on the health system, and follows the announcement of £145 million to improve emergency care within the NHS this winter.

The money will pay for home care packages to help patients get out of hospital quicker, reablement packages to help patients carry out everyday tasks and regain mobility and confidence, and home adaptations.

I have lobbied extensively for more money for social care for our local Councils and am glad we will receive some of this latest increase.

Wokingham will gain £401,589 and West Berkshire £500,898.

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## No more delays – just get on with it

As the EU does not want to do a deal on our future relationship anytime soon the UK must leave in March 2019 without signing the one sided and damaging Withdrawal Agreement they propose. We can then proceed to negotiate a free trade agreement with them if they want to. Many Conservative MPs are making it clear to the government that we will not support legislation seeking to prolong transition, nor will we support 21 months transition and large payments for no good reason. So far there is no sign of any deal better than just leaving. Extending our period under their control would take us into another 7 year spending period where the EU would not doubt want even more money from us.

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## The nationalised railway lets us down

I am still getting complaints about late and cancelled trains. I was sorry to see how many people were left stranded by a failure of the overhead power system on Great Western yesterday. Network Rail has decided to spend a lot of money on changing over to overhead electrical current to power the trains, but this leaves the system more vulnerable to accidents and to adverse weather doing damage to the power supply, with knock on effects to many trains.

My own recent experiences reinforces the view that there are problems.

I went to Yorkshire to speak two weeks ago, and to Cornwall last week. All four trains were around half an hour late. Most of the delays seemed to come from Network Rail issues, the fully nationalised part of the railway.

The train to Yorkshire was delayed by half an hour at Kings Cross owing to an unexplained incident to the north of London which delayed all Kings Cross departures. The train from Reading to Cornwall was delayed by a tree on the line. The train back to London from Yorkshire was delayed by slow trains ahead, with Network Rail unable to provide track capacity for a faster train. The train from Cornwall to Reading also fell foul of slower trains as well as service delays owing to quite high winds.

Why can't Network put in more passing places? Why can't they accelerate digital signalling to provide more train paths and instant re routing where possible and necessary?

It is true some of the train companies also have problems. GWR have recently acquired expensive new Hitachi trains to adapt to an expensive and partial

electrification by Network Rail. My recent journey had no reservations on seats. I was told by two staff members that the GWR and Hitachi seat systems don't work together. The new trains have to have several heavy diesel engines to generate power to run on the lines that are not electrified. This entails a double energy loss, once on power generation and once from the electric motors. This loss is presumably bigger than the double loss on using power station power from electric overheads where available, as the on board generators are likely to be less efficient than a large power station. The need for two forms of energy to turn the electric motors is an added burden on the train operating companies from the actions of Network Rail. As much of the power station power comes from fossil fuels and all the diesel generator power comes from fossil fuel it is difficult to see the environmental win from this development.

GWR also often runs two five car train sets joined together which makes an odd train with no ability to walk from the front five to the back five whilst staying on the train. Passengers complain that the seats are less comfortable than the 125 diesels they are replacing.