

The government of England

When I took the unfairness of UK devolution to David Cameron as Prime Minister he agreed something needed to be done. The original idea of EVEN, English votes for English needs, was watered down by William Hague and called English votes for English laws. I always assumed choosing EVEL not EVEN as the shorthand was deliberate to portray a good cause in a not so good light. Instead of England emerging with the right to initiate our own laws in devolved areas of activity, and to veto any move by the Union Parliament to override English decisions on devolved matters, we only kept the right to a veto.

I always argued that English devolution could best be done at Westminster, with a Grand Committee of all English MPs elected to the Commons debating and deciding on English laws where they were needed for devolved matters like Health and Education, and supervising the English budgets. I saw no need for a separate and expensive English Parliament to mirror the Scottish one, though some in England wrote to me requesting one.

This week-end I call on the government to preserve our right of veto, not to strike it down. Surely on this week-end of all week=ends, when English people are united and purposeful behind our football team and proud of their achievement so far, we do not deserve negative treatment. I urge the government to adopt EVEN, a very modest proposal to give to England some of the devolved power the Scottish Parliament enjoys. I would welcome your views.

Energy Policy

Today I will post my speech on energy made in the Commons yesterday. I continue to press Ministers to reduce our dependence on imported electricity. They need to restore two crucial objectives of Conservative energy policy, sufficient domestic capacity with a margin for demand or supply shocks, and a mechanism to drive down prices so it is affordable.

My speech during the debate on Fuel

Poverty

I support the Government's aim of making a major reduction in fuel poverty and I admire the Minister's enthusiasm for the task and her wish to share this with Parliament and to listen to good ideas from across the House.

There are three ways to tackle fuel poverty. The first is to help people to have more efficient appliances and warmer homes so that they need to burn less fuel. The second way is to cut the price of fuel itself and the third way is to help people find better paid jobs and give them encouragement into ways of boosting their income.

We first of all need to work through the Minister on these plans and projects in order that more homes can be upgraded so that people don't have to live in damp and cold surroundings – how right she is about that. Can I ask her to make common cause with me to the Treasury, as now we are free to choose what to put VAT on and what to take it off. Can we please have a Brexit bonus for those who are in fuel poverty by taking VAT off all those things they need to buy to improve their homes?

Why are we still charging VAT on insulation materials and boiler controls and a whole range of green products that are necessary to lower the fuel bill in the home and to improve its warmth and its fitness for purpose?

That is not too big a charge on the Treasury in terms of lost revenue – indeed it would be a win for both the Government's green strategy and for its fuel poverty strategy. A dearer item would be to tackle the price of fuel directly by taking VAT off domestic fuel in its entirety. That too I would welcome as I do think that fuel is expensive in this country and electricity is becoming very expensive.

I would also urge the Minister to look at the electricity policy generally. There was a time when we had a great three-legged strategy towards electrical power. The first leg of the strategy was that the Government was responsible for ensuring that we could always generate all the electrical power we need in Britain for ourselves and that we had a decent margin of spare capacity in case a large power station went down or in case of a sudden surge in demand in a very cold winter.

We don't seem to have that anymore and I would urge the Minister to take action as soon as possible to commission the electrical power we are going to need if we do not wish to be dependant on unreliable, potentially very expensive foreign sources for imports should we get into difficulties with the amount of power we have.

The second part of the policy was to go for cheap power and cheap energy because that's the way to get an industrial recovery and revival and that is the way to get more people out of fuel poverty so they can afford the domestic fuel.

Again, we seem to have dropped that particular leg of our energy policy. We seem to be going for rather dearer fuel – we used to have the belief that the fuel that should be supplied should be the cheapest fuel always whereas now for various other reasons we often opt for a dearer way of producing the electricity or we opt for an apparently cheaper way but we need a lot of expensive backup capacity because renewables are interruptible. I think we need to look at the charging mechanism and try and make sure that overall, with our new mix of energy we can get to cheaper power.

And then, we always had green imperatives as well which are very necessary . Particularlyb important that clean air is central to the whole ambition and that wherever we are burning fuels we do everything we can to avoid dust and soot and particles emerging into the atmosphere because they are not pleasant for any of us.

When it comes to increasing personal incomes that is probably too wide a subject for the limited time of this debate .However can I just say that levelling up must be about encouraging people to go on their own personal journeys – we must be making available the educational opportunities, the training opportunities, the promotion opportunities within public bodies and through the private sector. We must be working with people, so that they see that if they are low paid today they have a reasonable prospect of being better paid tomorrow.

Cheap energy can underpin all of this, because if went for more cheaper energy, supplied domestically, we would then have a bigger industrial base because energy is often a much bigger cost than labour in a modern fully automated factory . That would create more better paid jobs to go alongside the factory in all the things you need to do to design, market and sell on the products that the largely automated factory can produce.

So, Minister, let's make common cause with the Treasury. Let's do more at home, let's create more better paid jobs at home and let's understand the role of having enough electric capacity to produce cheaper power here for all our ambitions.

The Afghan war

President Biden's decision to pull US troops out of Afghanistan rapidly has left that country fighting a nasty civil war with claims from the Afghan government side that there was insufficient consultation and no orderly handover. They feel their position against the Taliban is now weakened. According to media stories there was little consultation or discussion with NATO allies either, even though our military has done a lot to support the US led action over the years.

Let me begin by praising and thanking all the western forces and especially

UK military personnel who risked their lives or gave their lives in this long conflict. They successfully confronted some extreme violence and gave Afghanistan a chance of a better life under a democratic system that respects the rights of all people in the country and offers opportunity to women and girls as well as to the men. This makes how we leave important, as the wish must be that the home grown government and forces for democracy that we have left behind now have the training and equipment to stabilise their country and resist violence against people and the governing system.

I agree that we needed to make an orderly exit, disengaging our forces from direct conflict on the streets and supporting benign local military policing to create and keep a peace. The whole long Afghan war has highlighted how difficult it is for a foreign invading force to help establish a stable freedom loving democratic system once it has with skill and some loss of life swept aside a brutal undemocratic regime. We do not and should not wish to become colonial governments, however well intentioned, acting as supporters but seen as puppet masters of local governments that emerge from the civil wars. The US and UK got to our own democratic systems by civil wars and wars of independence our ancestors fought, largely without foreign intervention.

As governments will say to us, we need to learn the lessons – again – of the Afghan interventions. They seem to be the same as elsewhere. A brave military campaign can only succeed if there is the political skill to see through a lasting peace that enough local people buy into. A war can only be won if there are enough people in the country that back the intervention by the foreign power and see it as helpful. Viet Nam showed how horribly wrong such interventions can go when the US misjudges the military and the political realities at the same time.

Consulting on COP 26

One of my constituents has written asking me to consult widely on the topic of what agenda the UK should be promoting at COP 26. I think that is a good idea, so I invite you all today to write in to say what you think the Conference should be saying and doing.

I have made clear my view that the Conference should be virtual, as it will be telling the rest of us to fly less and to go easy on the air conditioned hotels and meat dinners. It needs to examine why it is that many people accept the science that carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas and that too much of it, all things being equal, can cause warming yet most are not willing to change their lifestyles, homes and transport in the way governments and green campaigners require. Where are the affordable new heating systems, personal transport and better diets that will be needed to woo enough people away from their carbon based lives?

It is important that the gap between the Green Governors and the rest does

not get larger, with cries of hypocrisy every time a leading Green campaigner steps off another plane or gets into a diesel taxi. Carbon cutting needs to be popular to succeed. That means better and cheaper products that people want to buy. It did not take rules, laws, subsidies and taxes to get people to buy smartphones. Over to you.