

The whipping for this week

I have been sent a whip for this week which tells me I have to be present in Parliament until 10.30pm on Monday, to 7.30pm on Tuesday, 7.30pm on Wednesday and 6pm on Thursday – all three line whips. I was planning to be there anyway. Attendance at Questions, non Bill committees and other meetings at other times of day are not whipped.

The whip does not tell me how they wish me to vote on any of those days, nor what the government motions might be. Indeed, Wednesday's business is down as a general debate on housing where no vote is likely, and Thursday is down as a general debate on NICE and rare diseases, again where a vote would be unlikely.

If as I hear on the media Wednesday turns out to be a motion over exit from the EU without signing the Withdrawal Agreement, I expect a three line whip to tell me to vote to keep so called No deal on the table. If Thursday turns out to be a motion over delay, I expect a 3 line whip to tell me to vote against delay, in accordance with the PM's often stated policy that we will leave on 29 March with or without a deal. I assume there will be a three line whip for me to vote for the Withdrawal Agreement on Tuesday, which I will be unable to accept. The Manifesto we stood on as Conservatives said very clearly they would negotiate the Future Partnership at the same time as the Withdrawal Agreement. They should have kept their word. Signing a Withdrawal Agreement making many concessions to the EU without signing a Partnership at the same time would be crazy. We would be paying far more than the advertised £39bn for nothing.

The government wants Leave voting MPs to fear that Parliament will take control and stop Brexit if we do not vote for the Withdrawal Agreement. There is no need for that to happen if we reject the Withdrawal Agreement. The government will have to offer leadership if that happens, by explaining why we must not take no deal off the table, and why delay brings nothing but more uncertainty and trouble. The government can stop Parliament voting to change the law if it wishes. It now has to assert itself and say it will battle to ensure we leave on 29 March with or without the Withdrawal Agreement as promised.

That is why I have set out what the whipping should be for this week in the absence of any clarity from Mrs May.