

The NHS

The important principle that people like and support is that healthcare should be free. We should all have free access to the NHS, and should expect to receive timely and good quality treatment in proportion to our health needs.

The only major departure from this was when Labour in the early years of the NHS introduced charges for prescriptions and glasses. Subsequent governments of various parties have given more exemptions to prescription charges whilst continuing with them and from time to time increasing them.

The NHS has never been a fully nationalised service. Labour's original establishment allowed GPs to be private contractors, running their services from private premises as many still do today. The NHS has always relied on the private sector to supply its drugs, bandages, food and other supplies. For many years under governments of all three parties the NHS has employed private company contractors in various locations to clean and cook, to provide a range of services to hospitals and surgeries.

Nor has the NHS ever insisted on all its supplies coming from the UK. Where foreign companies have developed good drugs that UK manufacturers do not have the NHS is willing to import them. The NHS is also cost conscious and usually negotiates a bulk discount or special terms reflecting its buying power.

Most people do not mind the NHS drawing on the best supplies from the private sector as part of its activity, as long as the core proposition of free good quality NHS care is maintained. The present government has no intention of deviating from this. These are common principles and practices shared by Labour and Conservative governments in office.

Appointment times for local patients

I am pursuing again the issue of booking appointments with GPs, as I have had some complaints. It is important that the additional money being made available to the NHS helps local GP practices to have easy access booking systems, and pays for sufficient GPs on duty to allow early appointments.

People often cannot be sure when booking an appointment whether they have something seriously wrong and whether early treatment is needed. Anyone in need of a doctor's advice or treatment anyway wants to press on with it as quickly as possible. No-one wishes to be ill and wants treatment promptly if there is a good treatment available.

A new fiscal rule

A sensible boost to our economy is affordable whilst having a balanced budget rule for all current spending. Labour's massive spending plans would plunge us into debt on a huge scale, damaging confidence and squeezing the private sector. It would lead to higher taxes for the many.

What do free trade agreements add?

There are so many misconceptions in current debate about the nature and value of a Free Trade Agreement.

The first is, you do not need a Free Trade Agreement in order to trade with other countries. The UK in the EU has no free trade agreement with either the USA or China, the two largest economies in the world, yet we have a large trade with both of them.

The second is trading as we do under World Trade rules there is no WTO requirement to impose tariffs on imports. We do so because the EU tells us to impose tariffs on food and cars, not because the WTO makes us. Once we leave we can decide whether to remove those tariffs or not. There is no requirement to impose tariffs on say drugs, and the UK government has made clear it would not do so.

The main reason we can have a successful trade with the USA and China and can have one with the EU after we leave is the existence of WTO rules. A country cannot impose higher tariffs against us than they impose on everyone else. Free Trade Agreements are allowed under WTO rules for countries wishing to go further than the relatively low advanced country tariffs reached under WTO rules so far. The facilitation of trade Agreement ensures smooth borders for the transit of goods between WTO members. All EU countries are members.

Free Trade Agreements can add a bit to trade by removing the remaining tariffs and a few other barriers that still exist under WTO rules. They are nice to have but not essential. It would not be worthwhile making big sacrifices to get one. They are gently mutually beneficial and for that reason countries do not pay to get them.

It is odd that Remain campaigners both claim a free trade agreement with the EU is essential to our continuing trade with them, but try to prevent any free trade agreement with the USA. It's a typically contradictory position to adopt.

It's the economy

After the bogus forecasts that the economy would plunge immediately after the referendum vote, with major job losses and house price falls, we are now told from the same sources there will be a Remain bonus if we give up on Brexit! There's not a hint of apology for the wildly pessimistic and wrong forecasts of the short term after the vote. There is no intellectual curiosity as to why they got it so wrong. There was no post vote recession.

Brexit is an important political change. It is mainly about our democracy and how we chose to govern ourselves. It is not going to have a visible impact on the world economy. Our future economic prospects rest much more on what our economic and monetary policy is from here.

My view is we will be better off out of the EU. That does require the election of a government that handles the economy well and promotes growth sensibly. We need to ease the fiscal squeeze as the government is indicating it will do, and we need to ease the money squeeze as well.

The forecasts that think we will grow less quickly out of the EU have been deliberately misrepresented as meaning there will be a post Brexit fall in the economy. That is not what the long term forecasts say. They think there will be a bit slower growth over a 15 year period because they think trade will be impaired with the EU. I doubt anyone's ability to predict accurately how big the UK economy will be in 15 years time. The things you need to guess to put into the models will be mainly about technology, future government policies, future interest rates, tax rates and the like. The state of EU trade would not be the main variable affecting the outcome. That trade anyway can be conducted successfully under WTO rules with or without a Free Trade Agreement. With the right policies in fifteen years time we will have shown faster growth than if we had stayed in.