



**HOUSE OF COMMONS**  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Dear Jamie,

**Delivering Brexit: Why I believe we must respect the EU Referendum result.**

Following the chaotic and complex Parliamentary manoeuvres this week, and some very confused reporting, I thought it would be helpful to let you and members of our Association know that I remain 100% committed to respecting the result of the EU Referendum in 2016, and to delivering Brexit.

With the vote in Parliament next Tuesday looming, the time for agreeing a Brexit Withdrawal Agreement running out, and Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour frontbench manoeuvring to destabilise the Government and use a likely defeat on the Withdrawal Agreement to trigger a General Election, and warnings from Michael Gove and Jeremy Hunt and other Brexit-supporting Cabinet Ministers that a defeat next week risks losing not just the Withdrawal Agreement, but also losing Brexit, I have decided that my commitment to delivering an orderly Brexit should take precedence over my concerns over the Agreement, and vote for the Brexit deal.

That's why this week, I have, with a heavy heart, decided to back the EU Withdrawal Agreement on Tuesday.

I thought it would be helpful to set out very clearly for you and members my position:

1. I remain 100% committed to respecting the Referendum result: a 48:52 split for Leave v Remain. The Referendum didn't say \*how\* we should leave, and it was always clear that the precise mechanism would be for Parliament to decide.
2. I am 100% committed to finding a Brexit Withdrawal that minimises the short term economic damage and maximises our long term economic prospects. (In particular, as you know, I led the Fresh Start Campaign for EU regulatory reform and I have been a strong supporter of the need for UK regulatory independence in Agritech, Medtech, and other areas of science and innovation which offer huge opportunities to our County and Country).
3. I don't think the PMs deal is without flaws – indeed, I have genuine concerns about it, principally around the backstop and the risk of a regulatory border with N Ireland undermining our Union. Personally, like Douglas Carswell and Dan Hannon, I believe that our joining the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) would better deliver the Brexit than the majority of my Leave-voting constituents told me they wanted (“to be in the Common Market, not a political union”).

It seems to be EFTA has a number of advantages:

- ✓ Inside the Single Market
- ✓ Outside the Customs Union
- ✓ Free to do global trade deals
- ✓ Taking back control of Farming and Fisheries
- ✓ Not subject to the ECJ but the EFTA Court with British Judges
- ✓ Only paying for what we want from the EU
- ✓ By joining it we would establish the “two tier” Europe I believe has always been the most sensible and likely outcome of the different visions of Europe pursued by different countries.



Whilst it is true that EFTA would require “free movement”, that is, crucially, free movement of “workers” not “EU citizens”, which is very different. Nonetheless I believe that to be acceptable to the many Leave voters whose principal concern was immigration, we would need to complement EFTA with two major UK reforms:

- (a) a major set of **UK Welfare restrictions for economic migrants** we need, to stop “welfare tourism” which so many constituents rightly felt was deeply unfair, and
- (b) reforms and investment in **skills and training** for our own blue collar citizens fearing economic redundancy.

4. I had been hoping that the PM would come back with a serious concession on the backstop provisions of her draft deal - and am still hoping she might.

5. For two and a half years I have consistently supported the NoDeal Option default as the vital ‘nuclear deterrent’ to aid the PMs negotiations with Europe. But it’s now clear from the PM that those negotiations are over.

And it’s now clear that the work to prepare properly for NoDeal was NOT done when it should have been. This was a huge mistake.

6. So. With only two weeks to the Jan 21st deadline to decide HOW we leave, NoDeal is not an option that any responsible Conservative Government can advocate. Hence last night’s vote led by Sir Oliver Letwin (a Brexiteer!) and a number of former Ministers of the Crown (including me) concerned about the risks and damage to the country and the Party from advocating and pursuing a NoDeal we are not ready for.

7. This is NOT an attempt to frustrate Brexit. I remain 100% committed to respect the Result and find a sensible and orderly Brexit deal.

8. I remain deeply opposed to a 2nd Referendum. The people have spoken. Our Parliament is sovereign. I strongly believe that if Parliament was to go back and tell the people to think again we would trigger an even deeper political crisis. We have to get on and sort this out and then each MP face his / her electorate. That’s how our system works.

9. The vote on Monday of this week - and the growing majority against NoDeal - makes the choice on Tuesday increasingly one of “the PMs deal or NoBrexit”, which will I hope make Brexit MORE likely.

10. If the PMs deal is blocked by the Opposition on Tuesday, as I expect, I am as you know working hard to promote EFTA as a cross-party Brexit Plan B. Along with Sir Oliver Letwin, Sir Nicholas Soames, and a number of Conservative MP’s, I have been working to get Parliament an “indicative vote” on the Preferred Options. This will force Labour MPs with constituencies which voted Leave to show their hand. We expect a majority for EFTA as a Brexit which could get through the house.

11. I’m conscious that the Parliamentary process must seem complex, ugly and opaque to people in the real world who “just want us to get on with it”. If only it was that simple. (And if only so many daft promises and irresponsible threats had not been made in the EU Referendum!) But rest assured I am working hard to deliver a sensible Brexit which will allow us to Renew in office and defeat Corbyn.

12. A Corbyn Government (in a post-Brexit Britain outside the EU controls on hard left state intervention) is a far bigger threat than the PM’s Brexit. We must do everything to make sure that in delivering Brexit we don’t inadvertently allow ourselves to become so damaged by the process that we allow Corbyn and the hard left Bennite cronies and union barons backing him, into office.



13. We need to deliver Brexit in a way which shows that the Labour Party is every bit as divided as we are, prevents Jeremy Corbyn from posing as a Brexiteer in the North and Remainder in the South, and signals to the Next Generation and moderate voters that we haven't abandoned them to pursue some narrow, nationalistic and ideological agenda. That will be key to our ability to beat Corbyn.

14. As I made clear at my recent re-selection meeting - this is my commitment as Conservative MP for Mid Norfolk. And I'm delighted that it was the basis on which I was recently and unanimously reselected.

I appreciate, as I know you do, that these are very difficult times. Brexit was always likely to be a horrendously painful and difficult process. It divides both main parties, and the majority of cities, counties and constituencies.

We have already lost our hard-won majority in Parliament, in the 2017 General Election when and I fear that if we get this wrong we risk losing more MPs, and damaging the prospects of our hardworking councillors in the spring elections.

I will remain in close contact with you through these next few days but I thought it would be helpful to let you and members have a summary of my position.

To reiterate, I remain 100% committed to trying to find a Brexit Agreement that can get through the House and allow us as a Party to retain our popular support and credibility as a national Party of economic competence, One Nation values and a commitment to govern in the national interest.

I attach my speech in the debate, in the house this week, and (by email) the link to the film of my speech on Parliament TV. (<https://goo.gl/YY6C9g>).

As ever, I hugely value your and other Members' feedback.

George

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