

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP**  
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



**HOUSE OF COMMONS**

LONDON SW1A 0AA

**Brexit: My latest thoughts:**

In recent days, the writing has been on the wall - we risk losing Brexit altogether. I've voted for 'no-deal' at every opportunity, and voted against extension at every opportunity too. We should have been leaving the European Union this evening at 11pm. But we're not.

Today, despite my reservations, I voted for the *Withdrawal Agreement*. Ultimately, you have to deal with the situation as it is, not as you would like it to be. I did so because it would have guaranteed we leave the European Union on the 22nd May, with or without a deal, and would also have removed there being any risk of a long extension. This is because this would have put in place an immovable hard leaving date through our non-participation in the forthcoming European Elections - thus meaning we could not legally still be EU members by virtue of us not electing MEPs.

However, because of the opposition of mainly Labour, SNP and Liberal Democrat MPs, it was again defeated - paving the way to the prospect of a long extension, and Brexit being scuppered entirely, or watered down beyond recognition.

Now, if we even manage to leave at all, we will likely have the Customs Union imposed upon us by opponents to Brexit, stifling the great vision we had for future global trade when we voted to leave back in June 2016.

We could also be forced into a second referendum, leading to greater uncertainty for people and businesses and irreversibly tampering with our country's democratic principles.

Whether we like it or not, the truth is that 'Leave' voting MPs, like me, are in the distinct minority. We have a 'Remain' Parliament. I have so often cautioned about the fact that many MPs say they respect the result and pay lip service to it, but their actions tell a different story.

Today's vote ultimately came down to a balance of risks. Given everything we have seen, Parliament rejecting the Agreement again has increased the risk of not leaving at all, or watering Brexit down so greatly that it fails to deliver on any of the reasons people voted to leave in the first place. In the end, I took the view that the fear of possibly being trapped in the 'backstop protocol' was far less than the inevitability of 'Remain' MPs yet again seizing control of the House of Commons' business and imposing a permanent Customs Union, and/or forcing a second referendum.



I will say more as things develop, but I genuinely fear we might now never leave at all. Or in any meaningful way - the worst of all worlds, where we are lumbered with the downsides of EU membership, and not enjoying the benefits of leaving. Loose talk from some 'Leave' figures of a long extension being good for Brexit is also a fallacy - the more the days tick by, the more the democratic mandate is eroded by those who so desperately long to stop it, and who crave revocation of Article 50 or a long extension as a means of achieving it. After all, when it comes to the votes, it simply isn't possible for ardent Brexiteers and ardent Remainers to both be right - yet they found themselves in the same lobby this afternoon, voting the same way, despite wanting entirely different things...

We needed to get this over the line today and leave at the earliest possible moment. I have regularly referred to the 'wreckers' in Parliament who would stop at nothing to stop or frustrate Brexit, and I suspect we will see the fruits of their labours next week come to the fore. I shall of course continue to vote against extension, and in favour of a 'no-deal' outcome as a solution to deliver on the referendum instruction, as I consistently have to date, but I fear they may have succeeded already in taking us to the point of no return.

For context, you can find my earlier statements about all this, here:

21st December 2018: <https://bit.ly/2TQDZYv>

11th January 2019: <https://bit.ly/2T8cNzO>

8th February 2019: <https://bit.ly/2Y0HXgo>

4th March 2019: <https://bit.ly/2uakhs4>

15th March 2019: <https://bit.ly/2uE6b2H>

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