

## Exiting the European Union (Agriculture): Foreign Affairs Committee

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons), Chair, Liaison Committee

I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for giving way on this point. I will, if I may, try to persuade him. Does he agree that Select Committees are at their best and acting on behalf of the public when their members can leave tribal politics at the door, focus on the evidence and work collaboratively to come up with solutions? That is what the public wants to see from this Parliament, as opposed to the often confrontational picture that they might see. This is the part of Parliament that often shows us at our best. My concern is that what we are seeing tonight will fundamentally undermine and degrade the important reforms that were brought in a decade ago, so I really hope that he will join me in the Lobby this evening.

Kevin Foster Conservative, Torbay

I thank my hon. Friend—and I mean that—for her intervention. She is right that the Select Committees are at their best when a member of the public attending a sitting would not be able to tell which party label applied to which Member of Parliament. I remember the time that I spent on the Public Accounts Committee, and the questions there were as fearless from Government Members as from Opposition Members. That is the strength of Select Committees. The fact that we work by consensus in most instances gives strength to our reports. If an inquiry was just an attack by an Opposition motivated by party politics, it would not get the support of Government Members. And ditto—if a report were trying to praise the Government too much, funnily enough Opposition Members would probably not sign up to it.

It is right that people do not take their party labels into Select Committees, but the conflict for me is the issue of the Opposition having certain protections in this place. In a situation where a Government had a significant majority, they could in theory start playing a game with these sorts of motion. I think it is safe to say that a game is being played this afternoon, but it is quite clear to me that there is a difference between Members on the Government payroll and other Members. Each Member can take their own view; I just feel a slight difficulty in choosing the Opposition Members on a Select Committee from my position.

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons), Chair, Liaison Committee

Does my hon. Friend feel that it would undermine the system if we were in a position where members of a Select Committee were always having to look over their shoulder, because they might suddenly find that their place had been made unilaterally vacant on their behalf if they were not following the party line? In this case, there will still be the same number of Opposition Members in the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Kevin Foster Conservative, Torbay

I accept that the balance of Opposition Members will be the same. This is not, for example, about someone having gone from the Government Benches to the Opposition Benches, and then a motion trying to flip back the balance. For me, though, this is about choosing the

Opposition Members on a Select Committee. Let us be candid: there will be occasions when the Government might not particularly want certain individuals from the Opposition on a certain Committee. That is where the conflict lies. This is about Government Members — particularly those in the Government — choosing the Opposition Members on a Select Committee.