

# Theresa May tells Tory rebels to fall in line as crunch Commons vote looms



# Brexit warning: Theresa May tells Tory rebels to fall in line as crunch Commons vote looms

Ahead of a series of crunch votes on her flagship withdrawal legislation starting tomorrow in the Commons, the Prime Minister was thrashing out a compromise to try to stop pro-Brussels Tory MPs voting against the Government.

She also pleaded with them to stay loyal to strengthen her negotiating hand as the talks on a future trade deal with Brussels intensify.

MPs vote tomorrow and the following day on overturning a series of amendments made by the House of Lords to Mrs May's flagship EU (Withdrawal) Bill.

Ministers fear many of the clauses tabled by Remain-backing peers could lay the grounds for scrapping or even cancelling Brexit.

Mrs May today urged Tory MPs to rally behind the Government in a signal of resolve in the negotiations about a future trade deal with Brussels.



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'I am trying to negotiate the best deal for Britain' says Theresa May

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I am confident I can get a deal that allows us to strike our own trade deals while having a border with the EU which is as frictionless as possible

At a special meeting of the 1922 Committee of Tory backbenchers, the Prime Minister said: "We must think about the message Parliament will send to the European Union this week.

"I am trying to negotiate the best deal for Britain.

"I am confident I can get a deal that allows us to strike our own trade deals while having a border with the EU which is as frictionless as possible.

"But if the Lords amendments are allowed to stand, that negotiating position will be undermined."

At Westminster tomorrow, MPs will decide on whether to overturn a Lords amendment promising a "meaningful vote" by Parliament before on any exit deal agreed between the Prime Minister and Brussels.



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Theresa May, Jacob Rees-Mogg, and Douglas Hogg

Introduced by Tory peer Viscount Hailsham, the amendment says Parliament should set a new "direction" for the Government if it rejects a deal.

Ministers have argued that it could lead to Parliament trying to take over responsibility for the Brexit negotiations.

MPs will also tomorrow debate a string of amendments giving extra powers to the Scottish Government and other devolved authorities to intervene in the Brexit process.

The following day, further amendments on Britain's future economic links with Brussels are due to be debated and voted on.

Tory whips were last night understood to be talking to potential rebels about rewriting part of the Bill to commit the Government to "a comprehensive free trade and customs agreement".

The change, based on a promise made in last year's Conservative general election manifesto, was being discussed to try to address concerns about the impact on British firms from the country leaving the EU customs union.

Brexit-backing MPs were understood to be ready to accept the compromise because the wording of the proposed amendment did not commit the Government to any form of customs union membership.

A senior Tory source said: "There has been lots of meetings. We are keen to engage with all members of the parliamentary party."

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Tory MPs have been put on a three-line whip for the vote and ordered not to leave Westminster during the 12 hours of debate and voting scheduled for tomorrow and the following day.

With the vote on a knife-edge, ministers were told to scrap prior engagements to ensure the maximum Government vote.



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Pro-Brexit demonstrators hold Union Jack flags as they protest. Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson is understood to have cancelled a trip to Ukraine for talks with military chiefs.

"The Chief Whip has asked colleagues to be available on the estate for these votes, they are clearly important," the senior Tory source said.

In the run up to this week's Commons votes, rebel ringleaders claimed around 15 MPs could join Labour in backing several Lords amendments.

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The figure was enough to deny Mrs May a Commons majority on her flagship Brexit measure.

Over the weekend, many potential rebels signalled their readiness to back the Government in return for key concessions.

## Theresa May's Tory Brexit rebels

Thu, December 14, 2017

### Theresa May's Tory Brexit rebels: The MPs who backed the amendment to the Brexit bill.



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## Theresa May's Tory Brexit rebels

Some were said to be alarmed about warnings that defeat for the Government could even bring down the Prime Minister.

One minister said: "I'm pretty confident we are going to win in the votes. The party seems to have calmed down a bit in recent days."

Former home secretary Amber Rudd, who had been a leading pro-Brussels voice in the Cabinet, pleaded with potential rebels over the weekend to get behind the Government and not risk putting Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn into Downing Street.

"Amber's intervention over the weekend was really helpful. It appears to have clarified a few minds," the minister said.

But some Tory MPs were demanding more concessions from the Government today.

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Pro-Brexit demonstrators outside the Houses of Parliament in 2016

Senior Tory backbencher Sarah Wollaston, a leading Remain campaigner in the run up to the 2016 EU referendum, warned she was "minded" to support the meaningful vote amendment.

"We would like to see further concessions on the amendment on the customs union because it is just a very sensible amendment that says keep it on the table, don't completely rule it out," she said.

Jacob Rees-Mogg, a leading Euro-sceptic Tory MP, today did not expect hard-line pro-Brussels supporters including the former chancellor Kenneth Clarke to back down during the votes.

"I think there will be some unity this week, it won't be perfect but it ought to be enough to get the Bill through and to reinforce the strength of Theresa May's position," Mr Rees Mogg said.



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Tory MP Chris Green last night said voters overwhelmingly wanted the Government to get on with delivering Brexit no matter how they voted in the 2016 referendum.

"There is no doubt what was decided and there's no doubt what is required," Mr Green said in a debate in Parliament's Westminster Hall.

"The British people increasingly - whether they were undecided, voted Leave or even voted Remain - just want politicians to get on with it and deliver a good no-deal option or, which I favour, a good deal with the EU.

"The British people want a fantastic relationship with the EU. That's in our power and the EU's power."

Tory MPs on both the Leave and Remain-supporting wings of the party were last night backing a compromise motion tabled by the former Cabinet minister Oliver Letwin.

It sought to commit the Government to strive for close "customs arrangements" with Brussels without joining a customs union.



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Chris Green MP

Most potential rebels were expected to back the amendment in a vote on Wednesday.

Mrs May was greeted by enthusiastic cheering and table banging as she arrived at the 1922 Committee meeting.

Outside the meeting, Brexit minister Steve Baker indicated to MPs that the Government was considering backing the compromise.

"The Government will look very carefully at what they have tabled and we will take a decision on whether or not we can support it in the usual way," he said.

He added: "Our policy is to leave the customs union so that we can conduct our own independent trade policy but it would be appropriate that we have an arrangement in place with the European Union."

Mr Baker insisted he was confident the Government would win the "ping pong" battle with the legislation bouncing between the Commons and the Lords.

"We go forward into this ping pong with considerable confidence.

"We feel our party is going to unite in the national interest to send this Bill back to the House of Lords in good shape.

"Some of these amendments which the Lords have put down would threaten our negotiating position," he said.

## G7 summit 2018 in pictures: World leaders unite in Canada

Sat, June 9, 2018

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The G7 Summit runs from 8 to 9 June in Charlevoix, Canada.



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U.S. President Trump attends a G7 and Gender Equality Advisory Council meeting

Standing alongside Mr Baker, his frontbench colleague Robert Buckland appealed for party unity.

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Mr Buckland, the Solicitor General, said: "There's ongoing work happening and I think it's emblematic, actually, of a real sense of common purpose in the party that we all hang together or we all hang separately.

"It's more than just about party unity, this is about the national interest."

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