

Brexit: Boris Johnson paves way for snap election



Johnson: 'There are no circumstances in which I will ask Brussels to delay'

BORIS Johnson has raised the stakes over Brexit, paving the way for a general election on Monday, October 14.

He made clear that if MPs backed a move to block a no-deal Brexit today, he would call a Commons vote within 24 hours to authorize a snap poll.

The Prime Minister stressed he did not want an election but warned progress in the talks with the EU would be made "absolutely impossible" if the so-called Rebel Alliance won the vote, expected this evening, to take control of the Commons agenda on Wednesday and "chop the legs out from under the UK's position".

Addressing the nation from behind a lectern in Downing Street, Mr. Johnson

declared: "I want everyone to know there are no circumstances in which I will ask Brussels to delay. We are leaving on October 31; no ifs no buts. We will not accept any attempt to go back on our promises or scrub that referendum."

- **ANALYSIS:** Boris Johnson's big gamble - if rebels take control of Commons, he will seek to call Oct 14 election

As many as 20 Tory rebels are set to join forces with Labour, the SNP and the Liberal Democrats to bring forward a bill designed to stop the UK leaving the EU on October 31 without an agreement.

Under the terms of the proposed law, the Government would have to seek a delay to the UK's EU withdrawal until January 31, 2020, if there were no agreement with Brussels by October 19 and Parliament had not approved a no-deal Brexit.

Sir Keir Starmer, the Shadow Brexit Secretary, said it could be the UK Parliament's "last chance" to stop a "reckless and damaging" no-deal Brexit.

After an emergency Cabinet was unexpectedly called, rumors swirled around Westminster that Mr. Johnson was about to announce a snap election. The appearance of the lectern seemed to confirm that a major announcement was about to be made.

To a chorus of "stop no-deal" from protesters outside the Downing St gates, the PM emerged to insist progress was being made with Brussels and UK negotiators had to be allowed to get on with their work without interference from Westminster.

"And without an election," he declared. "I don't want an election and you don't want an election. Let us get on with the people's agenda, fighting crime, improving the NHS, boosting schools, cutting the cost of living, and unlocking talent and opportunity across the entire United Kingdom with infrastructure, education, and technology.

"It is a massive agenda. Let's come together and get it done and let's get Brexit done by October 31," he added.

The initial reaction from political opponents suggested Mr. Johnson had "bottled it".

Tom Watson, the Deputy Labour leader, tweeted: “What was that @BorisJohnson statement all about? His press people had spun that he’d threaten to call an election. Has he changed his mind? More hot air, again.”

Nicola Sturgeon claimed it was “plainly obvious” from the PM’s statement that he had no plan to get a Brexit deal.

“If MPs blink tomorrow,” said the First Minister, “he will drive the UK off the no-deal cliff on October 31. He must not get away with it.”

The Greens’ Caroline Lucas said: “More bluster from Boris Johnson outside No 10. The truth is he’s about to lose this week’s vote in Parliament and is running scared.”

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But, later, a senior official explained that Mr. Johnson would request a general election on October 14 if MPs backed the cross-party move to seize control of Commons business on Tuesday.

A motion for the early election would be tabled by the Government; it would require the support of two-thirds of MPs under the provisions of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act.

MPs, said the official in a clear message to Tory rebels, would be faced with a “simple choice”; keeping the current PM negotiating a Brexit deal or handing the process over to Mr. Corbyn.

He made clear the Rebel Alliance’s vote to extend Brexit would be treated as a vote of no-confidence in the Johnson Government and that any Conservative MP voting for it would have the whip removed.

“If they vote tomorrow to wreck the negotiation process, to go against giving Britain the ability to negotiate a deal, then they’ll also have to reflect on what comes next,” insisted the official.

He claimed voting to block a no-deal outcome would “destroy” Britain’s negotiating position with Brussels.

“I cannot stress enough; this is what is coming out of Brussels, this is what is coming out of EU leaders.”

The senior source declared: “Tory MPs voting for this motion tomorrow will essentially be taking the Government’s control of the legislative agenda and handing it over to the Opposition; the Opposition led by Jeremy Corbyn.”

He said the motion on an early election would be published before MPs voted on Tuesday so they would know the consequences of their actions.

“If MPs were to vote tomorrow to take control of the order paper, so destroy the Government’s negotiating position, to make it impossible for the UK to negotiate a deal with Brussels, then the vote would then move to a...vote, which I would expect to bring about a general election.

“If you were to have any chance of securing a deal, which the PM has been very clear that he wants the deal, you would want to have that election on October 14 so that you can go to European Council and secure a deal.”

The Council summit meeting of EU leaders on October 17 is seen as the last chance to achieve an agreement before the Hallowe’en deadline.

But a source close the group of rebel Conservative MPs opposed to a no-deal Brexit said: “It’s a bit rich for the Prime Minister to point the finger at colleagues who plan to defy the party whip - colleagues who voted for a deal three times - while he voted with Jeremy Corbyn to inflict the two biggest parliamentary defeats on a government in British history.

“The Prime Minister seems to be doing everything he can to bring about an election while claiming it’s the last thing he wants,” he added.

Mr. Johnson’s Downing St statement came as Tory MPs enjoyed a reception in the gardens of No 10; after being ordered to hand in their phones.

Earlier, the PM was accused of “goaded” some Tory MPs to rebel so he could force a snap general election having ejected opponents of a no-deal Brexit from the party.

“They seem to be quite prepared for there to be a rebellion, then to purge those who support the rebellion from the party,” said David Gauke, the former Justice

Secretary.

Mr. Corbyn, who called a meeting of his Shadow Cabinet in Salford to discuss tactics, said: "First we must come together to stop no-deal; this week could be our last chance.

"We are working with other parties to do everything necessary to pull our country back from the brink. Then we need a general election."

He will be joined by other opposition leaders in Westminster - including the SNP's Ian Blackford and Liberal Democrat Jo Swinson - for further talks about their approach on Tuesday.

Mr. Blackford said SNP MPs were standing ready for the "parliamentary fight of their lives to prevent a catastrophic no-deal Brexit".

Source:

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