
BRITISH MPS PICK AMONG 10 HOPEFULS TO BE NEXT PM

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Ten politicians have passed the first hurdle to be Britain's next prime minister, with Brexit and threats of "no deal" dominating the race.

The contest is being led by former foreign minister Boris Johnson, followed by the current foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt, and the party's former parliamentary leader Andrea Leadsom, according to Ladbrokes, a British gambling firm.

Environment minister Michael Gove and former Brexit negotiator Dominic Raab also had fair odds.

But the other five candidates who got the go ahead on Monday (10 June), because they had the support of at least eight Tory MPs each, are seen largely as no-hopers.

These included international development minister Rory Stewart, home affairs minister Sajid Javid, former work and pensions minister and ex-TV presenter Esther McVey, health minister Matthew Hancock, and former immigration minister Mark Harper.

Conservative deputies will hold the first vote on the 10 names on Thursday morning, with those who get fewer than 17 votes to be knocked out.

The voting will continue next week until just two candidates are left.

The 150,000 or so Conservative party members will then elect Britain's new leader and the man or woman who is to steer them through Brexit, after Theresa May resigned this month following a series of parliamentary defeats and cabinet resignations over her EU exit vision, as well as a disastrous showing in the recent European Parliament elections.

If Johnson wins, it would amount to a "horror scenario", according to a tweet, back in 2017, when Johnson's candidacy was already being talked about, by Martin Selmayr, a top EU civil servant.

Selmayr said Johnson used the same kind of "populism" as US leader Donald Trump and French far-right leader Marine Le Pen to get ahead.

Johnson has said the UK should leave the EU on 31 October whether it has an exit deal in place or not and that it should withhold the £39 billion that the EU says it owes as a divorce payment due to prior budgetary commitments.

He has also tried to appeal to the British middle class by promising to cut taxes for people who earn more than €56,000 a year in a move set to cost Britain's treasury about €11bn a year.

"I will do for this country what I did for London where we were able to lift the poor and the needy in our society while also sticking up for the wealth creators," the former London mayor said on Monday.

Hunt, the foreign minister, is a former 'Remain' supporter who has pledged to renegotiate May's exit deal despite EU refusals to do so.

He has also flirted with populism by comparing the EU to the Soviet Union in the past.

Leadsom is a hard Brexiteer, like Johnson, who has also promised to leave in October no matter what and who said she would force the EU to agree a new trade deal.

Gove, the environment minister, co-led the Leave side back in 2016, but also backed May's unpopular EU exit deal, tarnishing his image among Tory Brexiteers.

"It wasn't enough to believe in Brexit - you've got to be able to deliver it. I will make sure we leave the EU and take back control of our money, our borders and our law," he said on Monday.

He attacked Johnson's tax-cut promise, adding that "the poor must come first".

But his bid has suffered from recent admissions that he took cocaine some 20 years ago, even though Johnson had also earlier admitted the same on a TV show.

Raab, the former Brexit secretary, is another hard Brexiteer who was accused by the EU's Selmayr of "pure disinformation" and of making "fraudulent" claims on the future of Ireland after Brexit.

But he took that as a compliment while speaking to the BBC on Sunday. It "it "probably tells you that I was doing my job in terms of pressing them hard and making sure that Britain's interests were resolutely defended", he said.

From the outsiders, Stewart has the most colourful past, having hiked through Afghanistan, smoked opium there, worked as governor of a province in Iraq, and acted as a private tutor to Britain's royal family.

He believes "citizens' councils", made up of ordinary British people, should be formed to decide the way forward on a new Brexit deal.

Javid is a former Remainer who has also pledged to get the EU to renegotiate Brexit and who has tried to raise his profile by stopping migrant boats from coming from France.

'A little crazy'

For his part, Jean-Claude Piris, the former top lawyer of the EU Council in Brussels, summed up the mood in the EU capital when he told British newspaper the Guardian: "People in Brussels are fed up that the political class in the UK has gone a little bit crazy".

Amelie de Montchalin, France's EU affairs minister, also poured cold water on British ideas that the exit deal could be changed.

"The exit agreement was not negotiated against the British; negotiators on both sides tried, painstakingly, to find the best solution for all concerned," she told the Guardian.

"If Britain does want to leave, and if it wants to leave in an orderly fashion, then this is the way it must do it," she added.

Johnson's threat on the divorce bill was "a matter of respecting international law", she also said.

De Montchalin noted that France could back a further extension to the 31 October date, but only if the UK made clear how that would help get a deal through.

"The problem is that there are almost as many kinds of Brexit as there are MPs. But we do need clarity now. We need a decision," she said.

Kaynak/Source: