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## **MPS' VOTE ON BREXIT BILL PLANNED FOR FRIDAY**

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BBC (16 December 2019)

The government plans to ask MPs to vote on Boris Johnson's Brexit bill on Friday, Downing Street has said.

The PM's spokesman said the government planned to start the process in Parliament before Christmas in the "proper constitutional way".

The Withdrawal Agreement Bill is the legislation that will enable Brexit to happen - the UK is due to leave the EU on 31 January.

It comes as the PM prepares to address his new MPs in Westminster.

Many of the 109 new Conservative MPs won in areas traditionally held by Labour in Thursday's election, which saw the party gain an 80-seat majority.

Mr Johnson is also carrying out a mini cabinet reshuffle, naming Simon Hart as Welsh Secretary. It marks a big promotion for the 56-year-old MP for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, who was previously a junior minister in the Cabinet Office.

The prime minister has also cleared a parliamentary report into alleged Russian interference in UK democracy for publication.

The Queen will formally open Parliament on Thursday when she sets out the government's legislative programme.

The prime minister's official spokesman told a Westminster briefing: "We plan to start the process [of the withdrawal agreement bill] before Christmas and will do so in the proper constitutional way in discussion with the Speaker."

The Speaker - Lindsay Hoyle was elected to the role last month - is in charge of proceedings in the Commons.

Asked if the legislation would be identical to that introduced in the last Parliament, the spokesman said: "You will have to wait for it to be published but it will reflect the agreement that we made with the EU on our withdrawal."

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The bill is expected to pass through Parliament in time to meet Boris Johnson's promise for the UK

to leave the EU on 31 January.

Mr Johnson then has to negotiate a new trade agreement with the EU and have it ratified before the end of the post-Brexit transition period that ends on 31 December 2020. He has repeatedly said that the transition period will not be extended.

The Queen's Speech is also expected to include legislation linked to pledges made during the election campaign - most notably a guarantee on NHS funding.

### **'Close co-operation'**

The prime minister's spokesman also said Mr Johnson had "carefully considered" the report from the Commons Intelligence and Security Committee into alleged Russian interference in UK democracy.

"He is content publication would not prejudice the functions of those bodies that safeguard our national security," the spokesman said.

"Publication will be a matter for the new ISC in due course."

During the election campaign, critics said Downing Street was stalling on its release until after the election.

The report includes evidence from UK intelligence services concerning Russian attempts to influence the outcome of the 2016 EU referendum and 2017 general election.

Elsewhere, Downing Street added that the prime minister had spoken to US President Donald Trump, who congratulated him on the election result.

They discussed the "huge importance" of the UK-US relationship and looked forward to "continued close co-operation" on issues such as security and the negotiation of an "ambitious free trade agreement".

Elsewhere, moves to get the Northern Ireland government at Stormont up and running again are also expected, with talks resuming on Monday.

New Conservative MPs have been posting pictures of themselves on their first day including the members for Bishop Auckland and Stoke-on-Trent North - Dehenna Davison and Jonathan Gullis.

Meanwhile, the fallout from Labour's defeat continues.

Labour's general secretary says party officials are likely to meet early in the new year to agree the timetable for replacing Jeremy Corbyn as leader.

Mr Corbyn wants the process to begin "swiftly", Jennie Formby said, so his successor can be in place by the end of March.

She has written to members of Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) recommending a provisional date of 6 January for the meeting, with the process beginning the following day.

Both Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell said on Sunday that they took the blame for Labour's

"catastrophic" defeat in Thursday's election.

Speaking to the Today programme, shadow transport secretary Andy McDonald accused the BBC of having "played your part" in Mr Corbyn's defeat and said the corporation needed to "have a look in the mirror".

Meanwhile, Labour MP Stephen Kinnock told BBC Politics Live there were three reasons his party lost the election, including "weak and incompetent leadership", a decision to back a second EU referendum that "massively alienated millions in Leave-voting seats" and a "Christmas wish list" manifesto.

Mr Kinnock added: "A one-more-heave candidate for Corbynism is not the right way for our party to go, we need to send a very clear signal we are turning the page."

The race for their replacements has already begun, with Wigan MP Lisa Nandy saying for the first time she was "seriously thinking about" running.

Other possible contenders are shadow Brexit secretary Sir Keir Starmer, shadow business secretary Rebecca Long-Bailey, shadow education secretary Angela Rayner, Jess Phillips, who is an outspoken critic of Jeremy Corbyn, and shadow foreign secretary Emily Thornberry.

A new intake of 47 SNP MPs will also be taking their seats on Tuesday.

Leader Nicola Sturgeon has insisted this number gives her a mandate for a second referendum on Scottish independence - something the prime minister has told her he remains opposed to.

She said the Conservatives, who lost seven of their 13 seats in Scotland, had been "defeated comprehensively" and that the new MPs would continue to press for independence.

## **What will happen this week?**

### **Tuesday**

Proceedings begin when MPs gather for their first duty: to elect the Speaker, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, who replaced John Bercow in November. Technically, MPs can hold a vote on this motion but this has never happened in practice.

Later in the day, the Speaker will begin the process of swearing in MPs, who are required to take an oath of allegiance to the Crown, or, if they object to this, a solemn affirmation. Those who speak or vote without having done so are deprived of their seat "as if they were dead" under the Parliamentary Oaths Act of 1866.

Two to three days are usually set aside for this process.

### **Thursday**

The state opening of Parliament. The Queen's Speech is the centrepiece of this, when she will read

a speech written by ministers setting out the government's programme of legislation for the parliamentary session. A couple of hours after the speech is delivered, MPs will begin debating its contents - a process which usually takes days.

## **Friday**

Depending on how rapidly Boris Johnson wants to move, the debate on the Queen's Speech could continue into Friday.

The government will introduce the Withdrawal Agreement Bill - the legislation that will implement Brexit - to Parliament.

MPs in the previous Parliament backed Boris Johnson's bill at its first stage but rejected his plan to fast-track the legislation through Parliament in three days in order to leave the EU by the then 31 October Brexit deadline.

After the debate on the Queen's Speech is concluded, MPs will vote on whether to approve it. Not since 1924 has a government's Queen Speech been defeated.

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Kaynak/Source: