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<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/redbox/topic/tory-leadership/brexit-boosts-boris-as-osborne-declines>

Brexit boosts Boris as Osborne declines

One of the untold stories of 2016 has been the very gradual, almost unnoticed decline of George Osborne.

Where once Tory MPs would happily tell you he would – and should – be their next leader, now there is an air of reluctance. Boredom even.

The tax credits row, the Google row, the looming pensions row. There are plenty of reasons for MPs to be looking around for an alternative.

Step forward Boris Johnson, whose decision to campaign for Brexit has gone down very well with the Tory grassroots, according to the first poll of party members.

The mayor of London was the choice of 43 per cent of the 1,005 party members surveyed by YouGov for *The Times*.

This put him 21 points ahead of the chancellor on 22 per cent of the vote. Theresa May, the home secretary, was third on 19 per cent; Sajid Javid, the business secretary, was on 7 per cent and Nicky Morgan, the education secretary, was backed by only 1 per cent of members.

In a final run-off between Boris and George, Boris wins by win 56 per cent to 38.

Unsurprisingly, 59 per cent plan to vote for Britain to leave the EU – and Boris is now their standard-bearer. Osborne needs to find a way through the referendum campaign which doesn't alienate these members.

The problem with being the frontrunner is you have to keep promising MPs more bridges and bypasses to stay there.

Increasingly Tory MPs say Osborne would be "more of the same". He is "too technocratic". He has a "high-pitched voice". He would be "Cameron without the charm".

One Conservative backbencher, a fan of the sitcom Frasier, told me recently that his reaction to the chancellor is the same as when Frasier Crane is asked if he likes his brother's wife Maris.

"I like her from a distance. You know, the way you like the sun. Maris is like the sun. Except without the warmth."

Cameron reboot

The Queen's Speech is off. Well at least until after the referendum.

Parliament might still be saying it is [scheduled for May](#) but Downing Street insiders say it will be between June 23 and the summer recess.

The prime minister hopes to use a victory on Europe to recapture the Conservative party and drive through laws to guarantee his legacy as a moderniser, we report in [The Times](#).

Behind the scenes the PM is being urged by his supporters to "keep the Cameroon flame alive" and secure his "bucket list" of radical social reforms before he leaves Downing Street.

Prison reform and health devolution will play big, while education is expected to be a centrepiece with two bills, including an acceleration of the conversion of all schools to academies.

One minister told me: "If Cameron wins the referendum, there is a real opportunity to stamp his authority, recapture the party and reboot his premiership.

"The Eurosceptic rightwingers will have been silenced for ever but he needs to move quickly to say: 'I won, I'm in charge, this is how it's going to be now'."

All of which does depend on Cameron winning the referendum, otherwise his legacy will be written for him.