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"Don't vote for me!" Says candidate in General Election

December 9, 2019 | Oralya Balazs

"I don't want people to waste their vote on me." It is an unusual campaign message from William Tobin, who is running for election in prime minister Boris Johnson's constituency of Uxbridge and Ruislip. Mr Tobin, 66, is one of seven independent candidates standing against Mr Johnson. None of them are expecting to get even close to the 5% of votes they need to keep their deposit, the £500 fee candidates must pay to take part in the election. What is the point of running for election when you have no chance of winning?

Returning from delivering 47,700 flyers to the Royal Mail depot in Greenford, Mr Tobin sits down in his constituency office – his friend's kitchen – to explain. The result is a lecture on why British politics is messed up from the retired university teacher.

"Don't vote for Tobin, let Tobin vote," say the flyers, which were designed by his wife. Mr Tobin values his right to vote but, after living overseas about 37 years, he can no longer do so.

"Voting is treated as a privilege, not as a right," he says. "The point of my candidacy is the surreal fact that there is a contrast between that I can stand but I cannot vote.

"I am angry, and if I don't fight for my right, I think I will regret it for the rest of my life."

Mr Tobin was born and raised in the UK. After studying for a PhD in the US, he graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1979 and got a job as a lecturer at St Andrew's University, Scotland, where he met his wife, who is French.

He chose to leave the UK after Margaret Thatcher's government cut university funding in the early 1980s. "I did not have any prospects in the UK thanks to by Mrs Thatcher, so I followed my wife to France in 1982," he says.

Later, he spent 25 years in New Zealand as a lecturer at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch. He and his wife settled permanently in Brittany, France, in 2006.

After being out of the UK for more than 15 years, Mr Tobin automatically lost his right to vote. He had no voice in the Brexit referendum in 2016, even though the result of the vote could directly affect his life and the lives of the 3 million British people resident overseas.

"I also worry about the British people who brought their property in France in an isolated region where they live very modestly," he says. "It means their income may be below the amount than what French government considers being self-sufficient and then they may get expelled.

"I think in this election, Brexit is the overwriting issue and you have to vote tactically."

Mr Tobin's dream is to get zero votes in the general election to highlight his loss of the right to vote. However, he points out that it might be difficult to achieve. "People go for the polling and they forget their spectacles, or they get confused about the names and they put the mark on the wrong box," he says. Among the independent candidates in Uxbridge and Ruislip, Mr Tobin feels he has most in common with Bobby "Elmo" Smith, who dresses as the Muppet character. "I am not putting on a muppet suit but we both have serious reasons to stand," Mr Tobin says.

People might assume that Mr Smith is just another joke candidate, but this is not the first time he has stood for election. In 2015, he was a candidate in the Witney constituency against then-prime minister David Cameron.

The name Elmo comes from merging the names of his two daughters, who he has not seen for four years. "I can show them that I never gave up and I stood up in the election carrying on campaigning for them," he says.

Mr Smith has paid the £500 deposit to get the chance to speak with the PM. "I normally get about five votes but it is not about votes, it is about the issue of fathers' rights," he says.

Among the other Uxbridge and Ruislip independents this year, Lord Buckethead and Count Binface are paying their money to poke fun at Mr Johnson.

Count Binface's stood as Lord Buckethead in the 2017 general election, but this time around the name has been taken by another candidate

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Count Binface's stood as Lord Buckethead in the 2017 general election, but this time around the name has been taken by another candidate

His website explains: "HELLO EARTHLING! I was Lord Buckethead at the 2017 general election. I am no longer Lord Buckethead. This is partly because I promised to abolish the Lords last time and I'm a politician who keeps his promises, and partly because I later suffered an unpleasant battle on the planet Copyright." Count Binface adds: "Why am I back? Because I predicted Brexit would be a shit-show and so it proved."

Commenting on the large number of joke candidates in Uxbridge and Ruislip in this year's election, Mr Tobin says: "These people are the symptoms of the fact that the electoral system is rotten and in need of change. At the same time, it also is very important these candidates are able to stand."



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