

The INDEPENDENT

Anti-EU campaign chief wants NHS privatised

'There was a solid intellectual case to be made for Brexit, but that was not it,' expert says of Arron Banks' speech

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The founder of one of the main groups campaigning to pull Britain out of the European Union has called for the NHS to be sold off to the private sector.

Campaigners from the Leave.EU group have claimed in public that if Britain pulled out of Europe, the money that currently goes to Brussels could “be spent on our priorities such as the NHS”.

But during a visit to the United States, Arron Banks, the co-founder of the group who has given millions of pounds to bankroll the campaign, admitted he was in favour of privatising the NHS entirely.

"If it were up to me, I'd privatise the NHS," he said in comments reported by Bloomberg News.

Mr. Banks also claimed his strategy to win the referendum campaign was to “bore the electorate into submission” in the hope that turnout was low – which he believed would help the leave cause.

"If turnout is low, we win. If it's high, we lose," Mr Banks said. "Our strategy is to bore the electorate into submission, and it's working."

Mr. Banks was in Washington speaking to more than a dozen policy experts at the Cato Institute, a think tank dedicated to limited government and free markets.

Controversially, Bloomberg reported that Mr Banks conceded there would be economic pain if the UK were to pull out of the EU. But he said it was a price worth paying for independence.

"I'm a libertarian," he said.

But Bloomberg said some of the people Mr Banks spoke to were unconvinced by his arguments.

"It was the most unimpressive and unconvincing argument for a political case I've seen in years," said Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration specialist at Cato. “He appealed to every type of argument that's unconvincing: naked nationalism, nativism, anti-free-market, anti-capitalism ideas.

"There was a solid intellectual case to be made for Brexit, but that was not it."

The Wolverhampton Labour MP Emma Reynolds said Mr Banks was merely articulating what many other leave campaigners felt.

"Arron Banks adds his name to the growing list of Outsiders like Nigel Farage and Vote Leave director, Matthew Elliot, who want to privatise the NHS and undermine our cherished national institution," she said.

"The leave campaigns cannot be trusted with the NHS and these comments are further evidence that leaving the EU is a risk that we cannot afford to take."

A spokesman for Vote Leave which is the officially designated leave campaign said: "We wish Arron Banks well but we disagree with him. We believe that we should spend the £350m we send to Brussels each week on our priorities such as the NHS."