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Parliament has passed the Brexit bill, paving the way for the government to trigger Article 50 so the UK can leave the European Union.

Peers backed down over the issues of EU residency rights and a meaningful vote on the final Brexit deal after their objections were overturned by MPs.

The bill is expected to receive Royal Assent and become law on Tuesday.

This means Theresa May is free to push the button on withdrawal talks - now expected in the last week of March.

The result came as Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced that she intended to hold a second referendum on Scottish independence at a time when Brexit negotiations are expected to be reaching a conclusion.

Ms Sturgeon said she wanted a vote to be held between autumn 2018 and spring 2019 - but there is speculation that Mrs May will reject the idea of the referendum being held before the Brexit process is completed.

That Brexit process is set to take two years from when Mrs May invokes Article 50, which formally gives the EU notice of the UK's intention to leave. Brexit Secretary David Davis said. "We are now on the threshold of the most important negotiation for our country in a generation."

The **EU Withdrawal Bill** was passed unamended late on Monday after peers voted by 274 votes to 118 not to challenge the Commons again over the issue of whether Parliament should have a veto on the terms of exit.

The House of Lords also agreed not to reinsert guarantees over the status of EU residents in the UK into the bill, with the government winning the vote by a margin of 274 votes to 135.

Later analysis of the division list for the first Lords vote on EU citizens' rights to remain in the UK showed that 25 Labour peers sided with the Lib Dems, including former cabinet minister Lord Mandelson.

Earlier, the government had comfortably won votes on the issues in the Commons, with only a handful of Tory MPs rebelling.