

Dear Constituent

I am seeking changes to the way the government responds to the pandemic. I wish them to do all a government can to save lives, and to help the vulnerable find the protection they need and want from the disease. I also wish to see the government avoid measures which do substantial damage to jobs and livelihoods.

I am urging the government to work closely with medics and pharmaceutical researchers to identify more treatments to cut the death rates. There are various steroids, anti virals, clot busters and antibody treatments that have now been found to help or may emerge from trials as useful additions to treatment. Health professionals have also now discovered using non invasive ways of administering extra oxygen are often best. There are also issues about whether Vitamin D and zinc supplements can help. I have urged more emphasis on seeking new ways of treating and preventing.

I have been very critical of the data and forecasts used by government advisers to urge Ministers into adopting lock downs. The basis of defining a death has been changed several times during the pandemic and there are issues about whether CV 19 deaths have been overstated whilst understating other lung infections and serious co morbidities in the mainly elderly people dying. The latest forecasts for cases and deaths take the form of very wide ranges where the upper figure is three times the lower figure, making them meaningless as planning forecasts. There is an absence of reliable published data on hospital bed occupancy which seems to be the main worry of NHS management and the scientific advisers. We must not close the economy down to save the NHS if it can now cope thanks to building the Nightingales, greatly expanding intensive care facilities and recruiting many more staff.

I am pressing for substantial changes to lock down plans. I see no need to close outdoor sports facilities. I think a range of specialist retailers should stay open with suitable measures to cut risks of infection spreading. Pubs and restaurants should be allowed to sell drink as well as food for take away. Government should work with business and offer help to improve air extraction so more can function safely indoors.

I do support the schools staying open as this is important to the development and future prospects of children and Teenagers. This disease is usually very mild in young people. I have urged the resumption of non CV 19 work by the NHS, as many more people die of causes other than CV19 every day.

If you are suffering particular problems with your job or business from the proposed lock down please let me know as I am pressing for change from Ministers. Without serious change to this policy I am unable to support it in a vote.

Yours sincerely

John Redwood

Remembrance

Last year Remembrance Day fell during the General Election. As a result there were no serving MPs and I was not able to lay a wreath.

This year there will be no official wreath laying owing to CV19 precautions. I have therefore delivered a wreath to Wokingham Town Hall so the staff can add the wreath from me as MP to the wreaths laid last year by others. I also agreed to attend a much slimmed down Church service next Sunday which I assume will be cancelled given the likely new lockdown rules.

The economic damage of lock down

Whilst the official advisers seem to find forecasting the possible incidence of the virus and trends in future cases of the disease difficult, there is considerable agreement amongst economic forecasters that the anti virus measures are very damaging to jobs, output and incomes.

The latest proposed England lock down, allied to the lock downs already in force in other parts of the UK are particularly bad news for jobs and businesses in entertainment, hospitality, tourism, leisure, sport , travel and shop retail. Around one quarter of our economy will be subject to bans on trading altogether or will be trading in very restricted circumstances to comply with anti CV 19 requirements.

The damage will be mitigated by the extension of the Furlough scheme for another month, allowing 80% of the wages of people employed in affected sectors to be paid by taxpayers rather than by employers. There will also need to be more easy terms loans for struggling businesses losing some or all their cash flow owing to bans and controls.

The need for an Exit Plan is however paramount. We all need this to have something to look forward to. Businesses need it to know it is worthwhile borrowing, making do and bridging over a further period of lockdown. They need reasonable certainty that come next year they will be able to trade well, so keeping together expensive teams of people and maintaining plant and properties is worthwhile because they will trade again as they used to.

The immediate task is to seek to ameliorate the rules and controls, given the Opposition's intention to support the lock down on any vote we might get. The questions include

Can outdoor sporting facilities be used rather than all closed? The changing

rooms and club houses could be shut to avoid larger gatherings indoors.

Can pubs and bars run an off licence trade with home delivery so they have some drinks turnover, as well as being allowed to sell take away food?

Can specialist shops which sell home items be allowed to open to compete with the multi purpose food led supermarkets?

Can Garden Centres be allowed to keep open their outdoors areas with the sale of a range of items for growing food, food, home care and gardening with allowance of some trading under awnings or with plenty of through fresh air flow? Their stock is perishable.

When will the government press further with advice to allow adaptation of buildings to extract air rapidly to allow more indoor use with low risk of concentrated and infected stale air harming people?

The large increased costs to taxpayers of the railways and other public services, allied to the large subsidies needed for private sector business and individuals banned from working, cannot be sustained indefinitely. I am all for spending enough whilst the controls last, but there does have to be a recognition that we cannot go on like this through more cycles of relaxation and lockdown. It also needs to be understood that with this second national lock down we will lose more jobs and businesses permanently. In more cases their debts become too high and their owners will lose confidence in the longer term viability of businesses gravely damaged by these policies.

I remain critical of the wild ranges of the official forecasts and the highly selective and variable data being used to justify this policy.

What is the point of a lock down?

The first national lock down was said to be for one main reason – to save the NHS. The NHS was short of Intensive care beds and breathing systems at a time when that was thought to be the only treatment for bad cases of CV 19.

The time of that lockdown was used to procure many more ventilators, to put in four large new Nightingale hospitals and to expand ICU capacity in existing hospitals. More nurses and doctors were hired, and recently retired qualified staff were tempted back to help with the crisis. The peak demand in April was comfortably accommodated by the NHS. Serious cases came down, though some argued the peak had been reached at or before the lock down started. As we went into summer with more Ultra violet light and warmer temperatures which both damage the virus case numbers stayed relatively low.

The lock down also gave the medical and scientific establishments more time to research the virus, to understand more about its transmission and its

impact on infected people. As a result we now know than some steroids, anti virals and clot busting drugs can make a difference to serious cases and can save some lives.

Today we are told there needs to be an extensive “circuit breaker”. It’s a strange analogy, because of course a circuit breaker immediately cancels all dangerous power in a system, whereas a lock down does not immediately turn the virus off. When you put a circuit breaker back on full power is restored immediately, but what I assume these scientists want to do is to use a period of lock down to bring virus spread down, before resuming some relaxation which on their analysis will allow some drift back up. How does this help? How much relaxation would they allow and how much extra virus circulation would they find acceptable? Why are we not given measurable targets in advance so we can see what they are trying to achieve?

The advisers rightly warn us there may be no magic bullet or solution early next year in the form of a vaccine which offers full protection. This means the true question to answer is how do we live with this virus? What is the right mix of policy to keep the spread down, to protect the vulnerable, but to allow more jobs and activity than we currently enjoy?

It is no good the government imposing a whole new raft of controls over people’s daily lives if there is insufficient buy in by the public. To work people have to be persuaded it is necessary to follow the rules, and the rules have to be the minimum to keep virus spread down sensibly . What controls do you think are necessary?

Letter to BBC

Dear Director General

Congratulations on your appointment. I am glad you are reviewing the extent to which the BBC delivers the impartiality and public service content Licence fee payers pay for.

As someone who seeks to make a contribution to the main arguments over public policy, specialising in economic and constitutional matters, I find the BBC output is often biased against discussion and thoughtful consideration of views and attitudes that disagree with the conventional wisdom of the large corporations, civil service and international quango establishment. As examples I have in the past been denied access or time to explain the case against the ERM and features of the Euro which duly went on to do considerable economic damage, the case against so called independent central banks when they were in recession creating mode, to consider the opportunities given to nationalisms by devolution or to make the case to rescue industrial and agricultural market share lost during our years in the EU single market. I have written and published on these and other themes

extensively and wish to discuss them in a true Reithian spirit of independent enquiry. Instead I have to listen to a propaganda channel which just assumes the establishment view of Euro policy, thinks the single market is always a net gain which we must not lose, that Central Banks are wise and right and the errors of economic policy are all the fault of governments, and favours lop sided devolution which must be encouraged. There is a reverence towards so called independent experts who are often political in their judgements and sometimes not even good experts in their fields with poor track records at forecasting.

I do not think the BBC reveal party political bias between Labour and the Conservatives. The interviewers are usually rightly tough on both parties. There is however systematic bias against England, with many voices representing Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and liberal reporting of the devolved governments with never any consideration of the views of England where most Licence fee payers live. There is no English radio or tv channel to redress the balance, unlike the other nations in the Union which have their own channels. No-one is ever allowed to speak for England. We are endlessly told Scotland voted to stay in the EU but never told England voted decisively to leave. The BBC follows the EU agenda of trying to break England into regional and city area governments, whilst leaving Scotland whole despite the anti Edinburgh tensions in places like the Shetlands and the differences between the Highlands and the main cities. I would appreciate the opportunity to have a conversation with you about global establishment bias throughout BBC output, which has left the BBC finding it very difficult to report sensibly on Brexit or Trump or other populist movements. I think the BBC needs to do a lot more to foster intelligent debate about these economic and constitutional matters, as it misses out on many of the conversations listeners and viewers are having on social media in frustration with their state Broadcaster.

The bias is also reflected in the way so called populist politicians and parties in office overseas are reported. I am neutral on the US election, as UK politicians should stay out of foreign elections and be willing to work with any democratically elected government that emerges in an ally. Listening and watching BBC output it regularly frames the election as the Democrats would wish, concentrating plenty of hostile fire on Trump and his supporters but never doing the same to Biden and his. Coverage of continental parties in government that are sceptical of EU policy is also usually more hostile in tone than coverage of pro EU parties. I look forward to meeting.

Yours sincerely

John Redwood