

My speech during the debate on the Public Health: Coronavirus Regulations, 13 October 2020

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The Government are desperately trying to find that balance point between protecting livelihoods and protecting lives, and I am grateful to them for all they are doing to try to bring that off, but the only way forward is to get maximum buy-in from the public. There is no perfect set of rules or laws that can be enforced. We do not have enough police and that would require a mighty explanation task, so the more they can do by means of persuasion, the better.

Sharing with the public the dangers and showing them how hand washing, distancing and not mingling in enclosed spaces are going to work are the way forward. I am apprehensive about how much of this is enforceable.

Test and trace can work only if people who are traced are willing to co-operate. Quite a lot of people leave funny names, apparently, or they are not available when people are trying to contact them, or when they are told that they are a contact, they decide they are too busy to follow the procedures. They might genuinely be too busy and have real conflicts in their lives about looking after relatives, sorting out children, cooking meals at home or whatever it is, and it is very difficult suddenly to isolate if they do not have the property and the means to do all that, so we need to carry them with us. There needs to be a more energetic reliance on persuasion and less on formal rules.

My other worry about this strategy is that we need a plan B for the possibility that there is no early and successful vaccine. We all hope that the Secretary of State is right and we all hope that, by spring, there is a vaccine that works that can be produced at scale and that enough people want to take it so the problem goes away, but there might not be and this might fall down on one or more of those requirements. I urge the Government to think through what is plan B, because we do not want this continuous cycle where the virus pops up, we impose controls, the virus goes down a bit, we relax the controls and the virus pops up again.

That is deeply destructive to social life and community life. It is going to destroy many more businesses and many more livelihoods. Many more jobs are going to be lost. Businesses need some greater certainty that they will be able to trade, so I urge the Government to be more open with us about what is plan B for no vaccine and more open with everyone about how long these controls have to last and what their purposes are.

The 10 o'clock rule has become the iconic one that is opposed by some and supported by others. The problem with it is that people find easy ways round it. They comply with leaving the pub, but then congregate in each other's homes and use off-licence booze. They might be breaking the rule of six, but

feel that is a tolerable thing to do. The police cannot go to everybody's home to find out whether they are breaking the rule of six, but they can enforce turning out the pubs. It might be worse for people to drink at home than to drink in the pub, so rules have their limitations. Let us get more buy-in by persuasion. That is our job as politicians.