

My GB News Interview with Alastair Stewart

<http://johnredwoodsdiary.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/GB-News-interview-20.12.21-1-1-1-1.mp4>

The long shadow of Project Fear

I am all in favour of experts. I read a lot of expert opinion. Daily I learn something new from reading someone's research findings about issues of public interest.

Reading plenty of experts has taught me several things. It has taught me that some so called experts are not up to the title, producing ill thought through material with insufficient proof. The BBC is specially good at mistaking establishment propagandists for experts. It has reminded me that in many difficult areas the experts disagree amongst themselves, which is often a welcome way of moving towards a greater understanding of the issue. I have also discovered in fields I study that there can often develop an expert consensus, held by many for fear of getting out of line. This can result in a catastrophic establishment failure because most of the tenured individuals dare not disagree. In economics the Exchange Rate Mechanism boom and bust and the banking crash great recession are two examples of groupthink gone wrong.

The worst feature of recent years has been when the establishment consensus allies itself with political forces and tries to dominate the democratic debate about a topic. The Treasury and Bank of England forecasts prior to the referendum we now know were wildly wrong and were clearly designed to help the Remain campaign. They forecast a fall in house prices, a fall in employment, a rise in interest rates and a fall in the pound if we left. Instead in the early months after we finally left the reverse of all those forecasts occurred. In the year immediately after the vote as well house prices rose, employment went up and interest rates went down. This poor forecasting undermines public confidence in official forecasts. It also angers the majority who disagreed with the establishment political view on the underlying question.

Today expert epidemiologists need to grasp that their forecasts will be carefully scrutinised and subjected to commonsense checks because of past forecasting errors by government advisers. Net zero advisers keen to speed the transition will need to ask why the public does not rush to transform their lives in the recommended ways. They will find they need to overcome scepticism about some of their claims.

Democracy places non experts in positions of power to take advice, to consider conflicting expert claims and to apply some commonsense to recommendations. It remains the best way of proceeding in a world where the future is always uncertain. For a democracy to thrive we need to debate the cosy and sometimes horribly wrong consensus views of a self selecting group of experts in any given area. No one peddling views gets a ride free from criticism in a thriving democracy.

What a recovery package would look like

We soon will need to put the worst of the pandemic measures behind us and concentrate on the promotion of prosperity for the many. Controlling the disease should rest on the offer of vaccinations, better treatments, individual decisions about reducing the risk of infection and better air extraction and cleaning in public buildings.

The Treasury needs to acknowledge that its policy is going to squeeze the economy too much in the first half of next year. If they persist with their raft of tax rises in April, hitting just when energy prices rocket with the shifting of the price caps, we will see an unwelcome relapse in confidence, incomes and output.

The Treasury should announce now that it will not impose the hike in national Insurance, a tax on jobs and on take home pay, at the peak of the cost of living troubles. It should remove VAT on domestic fuel to ease the large rise in energy costs for consumers.

The Treasury should work with the Business department to increase the supply of domestic energy. Gas is a so called transition fuel which will be much needed this decade before new nuclear and other reliable carbon free electricity comes on stream. Gas also remains the dominant way of heating homes, as people are not yet ready to adopt electric and heat pumps based home heating. The government should give the go ahead of additional UK gas production, starting with the Jackdaw field and other projects ready to go. The government should also commission more gas storage capacity to help smooth wild fluctuations in spot market prices of gas.

The government should procure more reliable electricity supply from domestic sources as we are too dependent on imports when there is little wind. The Treasury should work with the Environment Department to fashion support schemes to promote more food production at home instead of offering money to prevent farming here, supporting imports.

All the time government advisers tell us to avoid social contact the Treasury needs to offer help to social contact service businesses. It needs at least to

continue business rates relief and lower VAT, and should offer direct assistance for cash flow problems of otherwise solvent businesses.

[NHS Ministers/planners do not trust the scientific forecasts of more Omicron cases to plan capacity](#)

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent estimate he has made of the number of hospital beds that will be needed for cases of the Omicron variant of covid-19 in January based on the latest forecasts. (91819)

Tabled on: 13 December 2021

Answer:

Maggie Throup:

In the absence of any data on disease severity or the likely transmission rates in the community, it is not possible to make any reliable estimates of predicted future hospitalisation rates or the number of hospital beds required for cases of the Omicron COVID-19 variant. As data on transmission rates becomes clearer over time and the initial hospitalisations allow assessment of severity and care needs, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) will be able to generate projections of predicted future hospitalisation rates. The UKHSA and NHS England and NHS Improvement are working together to collate this data as quickly as possible.

[Mr Javid's arguments for greater Lockdown](#)

Yesterday the Secretary of State for Health took to the pages of the Daily Telegraph to explain why he wants a more cautious policy. The crucial passages said

“We face a tsunami of infections in the coming days and weeks. Omicron spreads at a pace we have never seen before and has been doubling about every two or three days. Yesterday saw more than 90,000 new cases reported across the UK....The ultimate risk is that hospitalizations overwhelm the NHS”

Of course an easily transmitted disease will show very fast growth on first arrival on a small base. You would also expect the percentage rate of increase to slow as the number of people infected by it rises. It cannot go on doubling or growing at all were every one to get it, and well before it reaches that level you would expect a slower growth rate before subsiding again. It doesn't take many days to cover the whole population if it did go on doubling in less than two days.

But note the confusion in this statement between total covid cases including all variants, and numbers of Omicron cases. In recent days there has not been anything like a doubling of covid cases as a whole. Some of the fast growth in Omicron has been offset by declines in other versions of the disease. The last four days produced 87,565 (16 Dec), 92,503 (17 Dec) and 89,074 (18 Dec) and 82,886 (19 Dec).

We now know that the modellers have not been modelling better outcomes, distorting the task for decision takers of weighing risks and probabilities of bad outturns. When the scientists rightly warn that they cannot yet know how fast this will spread or how serious an illness it may give people until they have more data it is very important to provide good as well as bad scenarios to inform a sensible discussion about how much risk to run.

Hospitalizations were running at a recent peak of 9.345 on the seven day average on 6 November. This had fallen to 7549 by 16 December. This compares with an all time covid peak of 38.389 in Jan 2021.

Many people are fed up with alarmist scientific forecasts which turn out to greatly exaggerate the numbers who will suffer a serious illness. The data used needs to be accurate, relevant and presented fairly.

I have delayed the economic piece until tomorrow as this CV 19 issue is even more topical.