

My Question during the Statement on Covid-19, 28 June 2021

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his new role, I wish him every success and I support his plan to unlock soon.

Will he look at expediting trials of other drugs and treatments that may help covid-19 patients and have been looked at elsewhere? Will he also encourage work on air extraction and cleaning systems, to see what more can be done to stop transmission of the disease, as we are going to have to live with it to some extent?

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Sajid Javid): I thank my right hon. Friend for his welcome. On his question, I simply say yes, I will.

National security and spy cameras

There have been two bad stories about national security over the last week. There was the surprise arrival of top secret papers at the BBC via bus stop, and there was the revelation that someone had been able to place a spy camera in a Ministerial office without the Minister knowing it was there.

I did not defend Mr Hancock's conduct and thought he had to resign because he had broken rules and guidance which he told the rest of us to obey. If the recordings of his meetings and activities in the office was confined to photos revealing his unwise decision to kiss an adviser then there has been no harm to national security. The spying could also have been used for other purposes, and could give people the idea that maybe they too could place a camera to learn more of government decision making and thinking. Ministerial offices should be secure enough so Ministers and senior officials can think the unthinkable aloud, discuss a range of options, ask themselves what a worse case looks like without every more extreme case appearing in the newspapers. They should also be secure in case matters of national security or commercial confidentiality come up in their talks. In return for having secure offices Secretaries of State should of course keep their romances for private rooms elsewhere, and conduct any family or private business to the extent allowed away from government buildings.

The dumping of important papers in Kent and the decision of the BBC to tell us much of their contents even though they were confidential and in one case had a special top secret designation is extremely worrying. Only a very limited number of Ministers and top officials would have access to such papers. They were very recent, as we are told one went into detail about the

recent voyage of a naval vessel close to Crimea. There must be a successful investigation to find out who removed these papers from a secure location or who copied them. We should also expect a better statement from the BBC about why they did not simply return the papers to their rightful place in Whitehall. It can only damage the UK to put out some details about the sensible arguments in government about the conduct of defence and foreign relations. The correct democratic approach is for the government to explain its policy without offering up secrets or counter arguments to opponents, and for the Opposition when it judges it necessary to offer an alternative strategy or to criticise the policy and execution. An Opposition saying a foreign policy could go wrong or is not well done is democratic. A government expressing its own inner doubts about a policy it is still defending is unhelpful. A government with no doubts about its policy is arrogant or foolish.

Letter to the new Health Secretary

Dear Saj

Congratulations on your appointment as Health Secretary. I am glad you intend to make your main priority bringing the pandemic and the special measures it has required to an end. The great success of the vaccines and the vaccination programme make that possible soon.

I have been working on a number of suggestions helpful to combatting and treating the virus, and to seeing off future pandemics which I have put to your predecessor, other Ministers and senior officials. I would be grateful for your thoughts on progress with them.

1. Drug trials of drugs that may have therapeutic value in treating CV 19. After a relatively early breakthrough with dexamethasone, there was a long delay before reaching a positive conclusion on Regeneron. We are still awaiting more news on ivermectin, vitamins C and D and other established drugs.
2. The use of intense UV light cleaners with suitable safety precautions as a means of disinfecting health settings against the virus.
3. The modification of air flow systems in health buildings to ensure early extraction of virus bearing air to cut cross infections in a General hospitals or care homes
4. Improved protocols for the discharge of patients from hospitals to control transmission of infections
5. Designation of some hospitals in populous areas as pandemic hospitals and others as non CV 19 hospitals to make greater use of isolation to cut cross infection

I am also keen to see progress with the restoration of non covid work in hospitals, where there seems to be a substantial variation in rates of non

covid work now being achieved.

With best wishes to you in this important new task.

John

Cheap labour can be a dear option as well as a wrong one

The airwaves are alight with the demands of anti Brexit MPs and commentators to let more economic migrants into the UK to take low paid jobs in hospitality, care, agriculture and other sectors that got used to a steady stream of eastern European migrants to carry out the less skilled work. We are told of shortages of people to pick crops, serve in cafes and clean care homes. At least it provides a welcome refutation of all those anti Brexit forecasts of mass unemployment we used to get.

One of my main motivations coming into politics was to promote prosperity and wider ownership for the many. I have always sought to propose and support policies which would help more people find better paid work and to acquire a home and savings of their own. I do not like the cheap labour model. I have also recognised that we cannot simply legislate for everyone to be better paid. Each person who wants higher pay has to go on a personal journey, acquiring skills, experience, qualifications that justify the higher income. Every company and government department has to go on a journey to help promote higher productivity to provide the higher pay people rightly aspire to. One of the crucial debates in the referendum was the debate about free movement and low pay, with Brexiteers saying they wished to cut the flow of people accepting low pay from abroad, to help raise pay here at home and promote more people already legally here into better paid jobs.

Just inviting in hundreds of thousands of people from lower income countries in the EU is not a good model for them or us. Many of them live in poor conditions and sacrifice to send cash back to their wider families. They may not be able to go on a journey themselves to something better. It may work for the farm or business by keeping labour costs down, but only at the expense of pushing the true cost more onto taxpayers. Low paid employees may well qualify for benefit top ups for housing, Council Tax and general living costs which the state pays for. Each new person arriving needs GP and hospital provision in case of illness or accident. They need school places if they bring a family with them. They need a range of other public services from transport and roads to policing and refuse collection. The country has had to play catch up in many of these areas given the large numbers of people who have joined us in recent years. The EU once suggested a figure of Euro 250,000 was needed for first year set up costs for a new arrival. The biggest cost is of course the provision of housing where the state plays a big role

for those on low incomes. The need to build so many more homes creates unwelcome political tensions in communities facing concrete over the greenfields.

There is also in practice a cost to the businesses they work for and a loss to the wider development of the economy. If a business has easy access to low paid labour it will put off looking at ways at automating or providing more computer or machine support to employees to raise their productivity. If farms find cheap pickers they do not provide the same support and demand for smart picking aids or machines. We live in a period of digital turbulence, when artificial intelligence, robotics and digital processing of data and messages are transforming so much. Harnessing more of these ideas could both power greater technological development and associated businesses here in the UK and could boost productivity and therefore potential wages in the businesses they serve.

The UK and the EU has spent the last two decades leaving much of the digital and robotic revolution to the USA. It is time to catch up. Successful harnessing of it will spawn more new large companies and offer the chance of higher pay from higher productivity.

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[What should we offer illegal migrants?](#)

There is a big divide in our society about people who cross the Channel by small boat to gain entry to the U.K. Some presume these people are asylum seekers or economic migrants from poor countries that we should help. Others are angry that the U.K. spends its resources on picking them up from the Channel and the placing them in accommodation with free board allowing them plenty of time to try to establish eventual legal entry. They point out these people cannot be asylum seekers as they are coming from France, which is a safe country. The migrants themselves are often frustrated that they are detained and not allowed to work whilst legal processes grind on.

Opponents say why cannot we return them, having made clear they are breaking the law by seeking passage without permission. They have often given substantial sums to criminal gangs to help them reach our shores, and have risked themselves and their families in unsuitable and overloaded boats. They have sought to cross on of the world's busiest shipping lanes in very vulnerable vessels. They must have calculated the U.K. will rush to their assistance because they and the people smugglers have chosen to put them at risk.

Supporters of the arrivals say we have a duty to rescue people from their own deliberate mistakes, and should show sympathy for people who are so keen to join us.

I would hope most could come to agree that people putting themselves at risk like this is undesirable, and devoting so much sea patrol and rescue resource to this dangerous criminal Business unsatisfactory. The Home Secretary has promised new clearer law in the U.K. and a more united effort to crack the smuggling gangs and put them out of business. It should be an aim which unites most of us. I believe the Home Secretary wishes to do this, but has found the current law unhelpful for the task and is looking to amend it. She has also initiated an enquiry into the recent actions of Border Force in going into French waters to pick people up, when the French should have taken them back to safety in France.