

My intervention during the debate on Covid-19, 28 September 2020

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): May I have a progress report on something we have talked about before: infection control? This time round, will there be isolation hospitals so that we can control the infection in the hospital sector better, and will there be good controls to prevent the seepage of people with infection back to care homes?

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Matt Hancock): The answer to both those questions is yes. We have learnt a huge amount about those and put in place improved procedures, but I am going to come on to the question of the impact of that on our strategy.

The virus has shown beyond all possible doubt that the health of one of us begets the health of us all. Without a doubt in my mind, the central question about the control of the virus, and one that I ask myself every day, is, "How do we best keep people safe from this virus while protecting liberty and livelihoods and the things that make life worth living?" I believe that in reality there is not a simple trade-off between those things, because the exponential growth of the virus means that there are in reality only two paths: either to control the virus or to let it rip.

There is no middle option, because once the virus is growing, it accelerates. To the point made by my right hon. Friend the Right Hon Member for Wokingham (Mr Redwood), I am convinced that no matter how effectively we protect the vulnerable, and protect them we must, letting the virus rip would leave a death toll too big to bear. In reality, the only question is how to control the virus and when to put measures in place.

That comes directly to the question that we have been debating about both how to control the virus, and how we must act fast. The best thing we can do for schools, for our economy and for both lives and livelihoods is to act fast, together, to control the virus and to keep the rate of infections down. From that goal flows our strategy, which is to suppress the virus while protecting our economy and education until a vaccine arrives.