

# My speech during the debate on Public Health, 7 January 2020

**Sir John Redwood (Wokingham (Con)):** I am very worried about the loss of liberty. I am very worried about the economic damage. I am very concerned about all those small businesses that have been shut down, and their livelihoods undermined. I want the Government to introduce a more urgent, convincing exit strategy from these measures, and I think that we are owed more debates and more votes long before the end of March. We need to keep this under constant review, and keep up the pressure to take away those measures that are not strictly necessary or which can be superseded by something better.

I hope that the roll-out of the vaccine will go well and will be speeded up. I would like more information from the Government about why they are not currently using pharmacies, why it has taken so long to welcome back to the health service recently retired people who would like to help out, and whether there is going to be a plan to train suitable volunteers so that we can greatly extend the numbers of people administering the vaccine. It would also be helpful to know more about supplies.

We need to get smarter at dealing with the virus because, unfortunately, we will have to live with it for some months to come, however successful vaccination is. Will Ministers provide more information on medical progress with treatments? We had a great breakthrough in Britain with a steroid helping to reduce the death rate. There are many more things in trial—can we know more about that? Are there supplements that people can take to buttress their immune system and make it less likely that they get the virus, or is that a fiction?

Can we get better at isolating patients and protecting staff in isolation units or hospitals? Why do we not use the Nightingales as covid-19 secure specialist units to take away some of the cross-infection dangers from district general hospitals, and so they do not have the intensity of covid-19 treatment? Can we know more about the capacity of the health service, because there are differing views on how many beds could be made available should the covid-19 wave continue to deteriorate? Can we hear more on improving infection control?

What use are we making of intensive UV under suitably controlled conditions? What have we done to try to improve the cleaning of air recycling or air extraction promptly so that we reduce exposure of people in hospitals and other locations that we might wish to use to dirty air that could spread the disease? Above all, we need much more knowledge and information about the energy that is undoubtedly going into alternative treatments and better infection control. I would like to thank all those in Wokingham and the area who have done so much to help us during this difficult period.

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## US democracy

President Trump has failed to sustain a case of electoral fraud or miscounting. He was wrong to encourage protests on the day Congress met to ratify the result of the Electoral College votes.

The results of the two Senate run offs in Georgia will be highly significant. If both seats have been taken by the Democrats as the media claim the US will likely opt for a high spend higher tax strategy allied to a major decarbonisation drive. Expect plenty of drama from a 50/50 Senate.

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## Growing the UK's haulage industry

The UK has lost market share in long distance haulage. Lower labour rates and lower taxes on vehicles in parts of the EU have allowed undercutting of UK hauliers. The UK did introduce the HGV levy to require foreign hauliers to make some contribution to road costs in the UK, as otherwise their trucks did not pay VED and they often evaded refuelling here to take advantage of lower taxes elsewhere. This has been cancelled for a year.

Now we are independent we need to reconsider our haulage industry. The first thing should be to restore the HGV levy on foreign trucks using our roads and to make sure the UK haulier does not pay twice for using our highways. The idea of the HGV charge was to make a charge for use of our roads by lorries not paying VED.

We could look at the balance of containers that come to the UK unaccompanied and those coming with a tractor unit and driver from the continent. Maybe more could be brought in more cheaply by a continental driver delivering the container to an EU port and a UK driver picking it up at the UK harbour.

The railway needs to bid for more of the longer distance work within the UK, offering single container or waggon marshalling at sufficient locations where UK drivers and haulage companies can pick up the load for the final delivery journey. This becomes more of an option with the decline of passenger use.

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# Vaccinations

Today I expect Parliament to want more detail on how we get out of lockdown. The Regulations imply another quarter of badly disrupted jobs and businesses, with no early let up in controls. What would be the trigger to allow some relaxation?

As the NHS experts see vaccines as the ultimate way out, there will be active debate on how the vaccinations can be speeded up. Presumably if enough people can be protected the government's experts would then consider allowing more social contact and economic activity.

It would be helpful to know how much vaccine of the approved types is available on delivery schedules, and to be offered reassurance about who is going to administer the doses. Will the NHS seek the help of pharmacies as with annual flu vaccines? Will the NHS speed up accepting the volunteers with medical training who are willing to come back to work and would help inoculate people? Will others be trained to carry out the work? Will all GP surgeries and hospitals be offering the service and have supplies?

The sooner we can get back to saving jobs the better. Another national lockdown has a big economic price.

Some of the experts now seem to think getting the first jab into people gives a decent level of protection. This will speed up the process if they adopt that approach, which will require clarity for those receiving the vaccine over whether to expect a second dose and if so at what interval.

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## Can lockdowns work?

Many countries have imposed lockdowns and curfews. There is no sign from the international numbers that those locking down more for longer have been more successful in reducing case numbers or deaths.

The 20 countries with most cases per million so far are mainly continental European ones that have imposed tough lockdowns, and the USA with severe lockdowns on the populous Democrat controlled east and west coasts. The top six countries for deaths per million are small European countries led by Belgium, with Peru in seventh place in the grisly table.

Government advisers have long concentrated on recommending lock downs for long periods while we await enough people being vaccinated. Their ultimate way out depends both on good rates of vaccination and the virus not mutating in ways which defeat the vaccines.

I will press again for better treatments, better isolation and infection control in the NHS, use of the Nightingales as specialist units, better cleaning and air flow in public buildings. I have tabled more questions and will try to raise these matters in the debate.

Once again the official government advisers present the case for lock down but do not present the case about the damage lock downs do to many people and businesses so we can weigh the balance of the arguments. There is also an absence of regularly published and reliable numbers of hospital beds, bed occupancy and deaths from other lung diseases. The death figures remain with CV 19 rather than because of CV 19. I do not doubt that this is a nasty disease and some people catch a serious version of it which can be life threatening. We need to target our response based on improving knowledge of it, and offer good safeguarding to all those most vulnerable to it.

I will seek more information about the capacity of the NHS before deciding how to vote on new controls.