

Words are the currency of politics

Yesterday I voted against the government's Bill to introduce a Care Levy.

Words are the currency of politics. If you debase them you devalue your coinage.

I gave my word in the 2019 election to my voters that I would not support a rise in Income Tax, National Insurance or VAT.

The Care Tax begins life as an increase in National Insurance.

I will post my speeches during the stages of the Bill which raised a range of issues about economic policy, NHS management and social care reform.

My speech during the debate on the Health and Social Care Levy Bill

Readers of this blog might be interested to see my speech today on the Health and Social Care Levy Bill:

Part A

Part B

My intervention during the Westminster Hall debate on HS2

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham (Con)): Does my hon. Friend agree that covid has completely changed likely travel patterns, and that the big commuting demand will be much reduced? So where is the argument for capacity, which HS2 was supposed to be about?

Mr Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's intervention; he has read my mind—this is a point that I will come to shortly.

Bus travel

I have received answers to my questions on bus services. They reveal that only 2% of the bus fleet is electric on the latest government figures, despite all the active public sector talk of the electric revolution. They also reveal that bus usage remains low, even before the pandemic struck. The latest figures the government has supplied do not chart the fall in use that must have occurred over lockdown.

The fact that overall bus usage outside London was under 11 people per bus prior to covid tells us that bus services have to be heavily subsidised. London is stated to be under 19 people per bus. The figures presented divide passenger miles by bus miles. Buses can carry between 50 and over a hundred passengers depending on whether it is a single or double decker, and what the rules are on standing. The system entails subsidising the least popular services the most, as clearly the more passengers per bus the more fare revenue and the less need for subsidy. Bus companies are reluctant to cut out little used services, as of course they can argue that they need to offer a relatively frequent timetable to persuade people to use a bus. An outbound traveller who needs to get a return bus may wish to return at unpopular times of the day, so they need to run more near empty buses to keep or attract the overall custom.

Buses like trains have a relative advantage at busy times. They are best geared to providing commuter services into and out of job rich areas of towns and cities, and to offer shopping access at busy shopping times. They become very costly providing off peak services for people who may need to get to an evening event or to return at little used times of day or night. In London it should be easier to fill more of the seats on the buses given the density of people along key routes and the difficulty of taking private cars on cramped and inadequate roads.

What should the government and Councils think about how many bus services to subsidise? How should the industry go about constructing more popular timetables in a post pandemic age? It is a pity the government was not able to supply more up to date figures than the year to March 2020. I presume the pattern has change lot since then.

What is the Government doing to arrest

people who take money from people seeking to cross the Channel illegally in unsuitable boats?

I have received the following answer to my recent Parliamentary Question:

The Home Office has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (41593):

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what further steps her Department plans to take to arrest people who take money from people seeking to cross the Channel illegally in unsuitable boats. (41593)

Tabled on: 03 September 2021

Answer:

Chris Philp:

The Government stands resolute in its commitment to tackle Organised Immigration Crime (OIC). We continue to pursue the Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) who facilitate illegal travel to the UK and who exploit vulnerable migrants, knowingly putting people in life-threatening situations.

We are committed to prosecuting those who profit from dangerous and unnecessary Channel crossings in small boats. We are working with national and international partners in these investigations, and are continuing to improve the intelligence co-operation that underpins them. The multi-agency NCA-led OIC Taskforce is the UK government's response to tackling people smuggling. It has been involved in more than 1000 arrests, both in the UK and overseas, with suspects convicted sentenced to more than 720 years in prison. It takes a whole of route approach, deploying over 150 officers to operate in 17 countries, with Crown Prosecution Service prosecutors placed in key source and transit countries to disrupt OCGs profiting from people smuggling.

We also pursue those involved in the financial flows that support this activity. Using criminal powers in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, an individual can be prosecuted for money laundering offences if sufficient evidence is obtainable and CPS agree to charging, or civil powers within the same act permit the action to be taken against the money concerned. Both these approaches are used to undermine the financial flows supporting small boat and wider clandestine smuggling, both in the UK and with foreign partners.

We are working with NCA and social media companies to agree a joint action plan to tackle content advertising illegal OIC services on online platforms, including content relating to small boat crossings.

Additionally, the Government published the New Plan for Immigration

containing provisions to establish legislation to deter illegal entry into the UK, thereby breaking the business model of criminal people smuggling networks and protecting the lives of those they endanger. In July 2021, the Government introduced this legislation through the Nationality and Borders Bill.

The Government will continue to work tirelessly to stop the criminal networks facilitating OIC and protect the lives of those they wish to recklessly exploit.