

The Presidential election

Over the long campaign so far I have kept off the topic of the Presidential election. I strongly believe that politicians and commentators from another country should keep out of other people's elections. Today I do not break my silence so far to recommend one of the candidates. US voters do not need another UK MP or commentator telling them how to vote. I was appalled by President Obama's clumsy and ill judged intervention in the UK EU referendum, though I soon realised he had if anything helped the Brexit cause he wished to damage.

I write today to make two main points. Many of us follow the debates and stories of the election because the USA is still the leader of the democratic world. The person, policies and team the voters choose matters to us all. We need a USA that is strong in the defence of freedom, a good ally and friend, who respects us and our different democratic views and decisions. This election is particularly important, because the USA has before it two champions of very different world views and policy prescriptions that mirror the debates this side of the Atlantic and have read across to us.

I will leave aside the candidates other than Mr Biden and Mr Trump, as practically all UK and European media do as if they do not exist. I accept the polls and past history suggests the two main party candidates will command well over 90% of the vote between them and only those two have any chance of winning.

I will also leave aside all the character and behaviour issues which are part of the US debate because both sides have chosen to make character a big issue. Chance and often unfortunate or unpleasant remarks are in the USA as in the UK treated with undue fascination with extreme reactions to words, when what matters more for US voters and the wider world is what use would either man make of the large powers of the office of President if elected.

The essence of the debate between the two revolves around two major disagreements. The first is rooted in the immediate background. Mr Trump stands for livelihoods and Mr Biden for lives. The President argues fear of CV 19 is overdone and there are limits to what government can do to grant people immunity so he favours getting the USA fully back to work and a more normal life. Mr Biden believes the virus needs strong state powers to block social contact and shut down business that thrives on it to stop the spread and so bring the death rate down. Damage to jobs is a price worth paying to stop or delay infection. These two contrasting views are also very prevalent in our own country.

The second is their attitude to world government and the so called international rules based order. Mr Biden for example agrees with the fashionable consensus that climate change is the most crucial problem besetting our world, and wishes the USA to tread the EU and UN route to closing down the oil, gas and coal industries and forcing a rapid transition to electrical power at home and in transport. Mr Trump backs cheap energy and

defends all the jobs dependent today on fossil fuels and fossil fuel using vehicles and machines. He sees that as part of the prosperity machine he sought to unleash.

I will look in a later post at some of the other big differences, especially in foreign policy, their attitude to military intervention and different approaches to the Middle East, terrorism and borders. Be in no doubt this is a big moment in the history of the advanced world and in its impact of the democracies on world politics.

Time for Plan B

The decision of the Welsh devolved government to impose a wider ranging lockdown on an already scarred and weakened Welsh economy has made the contradictions and absurdities of too many controls more obvious. The supermarkets are told to tape up their shelves and fence off their aisles for so called non essentials. The devolved government stumbles over what is an essential. They defend their decision by saying that as they have closed non food specialist shops it would be unfair to let the supermarkets sell items the specialist shops cannot offer. There is no good answer when people point out that the policy will just lead to many more people buying the banned items on line, losing business not only to the specialist High Street shops but to the food shops of the high Street as well. How is that sensible?

The idea is that stopping more shopping will abate the spread of the disease, which then will allow relaxation of controls which on their analysis of course will lead to a further spread of the disease. How does that help? Why should the virus wait until after Christmas before it builds up again, if the plan is to relax a bit for Christmas. What proof is there that shopping spreads the disease anyway? People do not spend much time in the company of another person from outside their household in a supermarket. Air flows through stores of course need to help control the disease, and can do so.

As I argued in Parliament and put to the government, trying to change behaviour to contain the virus requires consent and co-operation from the public. There is no longer enough buy in to the detailed rules nor to Test and trace. The even more complex and wide ranging Welsh rules have met with a hostile response from many Welsh people, showing that the devolved government is losing support for these measures.

The U.K. government needs to learn from the Welsh experience. More needs to be done to encourage a business and jobs revival. There are many things that are being done and can be done to limit deaths. Improving treatments, safeguarding the vulnerable, improving ventilation and air flow in public buildings and improving infection control in health settings, can all help to get the death rate down. There are limits to how many detailed rules and controls government should seek to place on people generally, as government

has reached the end of tolerance for the current degree of control let alone for tightening. People now want explanations of why and how a control will help or is necessary, and why it should continue.

It is time to put economic recovery higher up the priority list, and to go out to save many more livelihoods. There needs to be another drive to get more non CV 19 medical problems treated. We have to live with the virus, and do all we can to lower the death rates from CV 19 and from other killer medical problems without shutting down the economy or seeking to control everyone's social life and shopping habits..

[Letter to the Business Secretary to get more back to work](#)

Dear Alok,

It is imperative more is done to rescue and help businesses that rely on social contact. Too many companies in events, leisure, travel and tourism are badly damaged by anti CV 19 rules, and some remain completely closed.

One way forward which could provide urgent relief short of repealing the Controls that do the damage is to help businesses adapt their ventilation and heating systems to make them safer. There is plenty of research saying that if a restaurant, hotel, meeting room has a system for extracting stale air promptly and replacing it with clean air it can offer a safer environment. Extraction from the top and supply of new air from the bottom greatly cuts the spread of the virus and other contagions in the circulating air.

I understand your department is responsible for these policies for the public sector and has done work on suitable advice and shared technical research for the private sector. Will you now make this more public? Will you provide advice and where appropriate adaptation grants to business to get this done quickly for all who wish to go this way? Could there be a CV19 standard for air change which those who wished could reach, showing their certification to reassure customers? Will you lead the public sector in adapting government and Council buildings?

We must do more to save all those businesses. Best of all would be a clear exit plan from restrictions generally.

How should we live with and control CV 19?

Today I seek your views on how much economic sacrifice we should make to try to slow or delay the transmission of this disease.

It is clearly lethal for a minority who get the bad version of it, but no worse than flu or bad colds for many others. The Global death rate so far from it is 0.015% of the world population, and it seems to account for under 3% of deaths. Cardiovascular problems remain the prime killer. CV 19 is on track to kill a few more than road traffic accidents but ranks well below cancer and other lung infections.

It is good news that in its second wave in the Americas and Europe the death rate is much reduced. Treatments are better and maybe more younger people are getting it with much less risk of death. Some of the advisers think it is just a lag and deaths will rise as they did in the spring. That would every worrying.

So how much economic pain should we suffer to delay the spread of the disease? Is there a realistic exit through a vaccine to make the cost of delay a price worth paying, or will there just be another flare up as soon as we relax controls again?

I think the government needs to do more to save livelihoods and needs to remove those controls that have limited utility in defeating the virus but do considerable damage to jobs and business. Can we do more to help people most at risk protect themselves from it? Can we have isolation hospitals and high standards of infection control in all care homes and other health settings?

Saving the NHS

One of the main reasons given for the national lockdown earlier this year was to get the NHS ready to handle a wave of CV19 cases. They expanded the Intensive Care capacity substantially, putting in new Nightingale hospitals as part of the answer, increasing intensive care beds in existing hospitals and buying more ventilators.

To increase capacity further they cancelled all non urgent operations in main hospitals, took over the capacity of the private sector hospitals to undertake some non CV 19 work for them and were keen to move patients out of hospital as soon as possible after treatment.

Today some people are still worrying about NHS capacity. Of course we all pay

tribute and say thanks to the dedicated staff who bore the brunt of the first wave of CV 19 in hospitals, gave diligent care and pioneered treatments to respond. By now I assume more have been trained to handle CV 19, and we see the good news that there are better treatments with the death rate falling substantially as a result

Today I would like to ask a crucial question.

What is now happening to NHS output for non CV 19 conditions? Ministers tell me the NHS is operating again as before for non pandemic conditions. Is it? What is your experience of access to non urgent treatments, and to treatments for serious conditions like heart attacks and cancer .

The NHS England/DHSS budget for 2020/21 was £148bn at the start of the year, up from £140bn the previous year by £8bn or 5.7%. The NHS had been offered an increase of £33bn by 2023/24 as part of a five year settlement to allow growth and improvement. Special money to handle CV 19 has now added an additional £31.9bn to this year's total to provide protective clothing, to introduce Test and Trace, to buy in private sector capacity, increase ventilators and provide extra facilities in the Nightingales.

I am seeking information from government about how output in the NHS now compares with this time last year. We know there was a large dip in activity during the intense period of the CV 19 crisis in the spring. It would be good to know we are more than back to normal, given the backlog and the resource now being committed. It would also be good to know when we can stop paying for the private sector capacity as well.