

Improving the NHS

I would like to relaunch today a couple of ideas I have talked about before to improve the service and assist with efficiency.

The NHS issues large number of items to help people with their injuries and to assist their mobility. Many of these items like walking frames, crutches, wheelchairs, and various supports could be reused after a deep clean and checking, but are often left with the patient or the patient's family. The NHS could appoint contractors who would pick these items up from the patient or from the hospital after use, carry out the checks, and return them to the NHS for another patient. This should be cheaper than buying new every time, removes the costs of dumping them as waste, and would be a visible contribution to recycling.

The NHS also uses a large quantity of other supplies every day. There are two issues about this that might be amenable to improved handling. The first is to make more use of suppliers willingness these days to supply just in time, delivering to the ward or surgery that needs the item. Parts of the NHS still have a tendency to double and treble bank stocks, with a central stock, a hospital stock and a ward stock. The more you stock the more chance there is of damage or of things going out of date. It also takes up valuable space. Some pharma products need fridge storage.

The second is to have good dispensing of the product where it is needed, with guidance to busy medical staff as to which they need. Modern stock control and access systems allow precision delivery of the items needed related to a specific task. These systems also keep check of supplies and can ensure re-ordering in good time so there is also back up. Making supplies available to people discharged from hospital could also benefit from better control of stock, so people get what they need in a timely way, but are not burdened with large deliveries which turn out to be in excess of their needs.

Transport of live animals

I attended a meeting to hear reports of problems for animal welfare through long distance lorry journeys. I am keen that Mr Gove should look into this and see what can be done to improve our law for animal welfare and ensure there is proper enforcement.

There is no evidence joining the single market boosted UK growth

If you look at the ONS figures for UK growth you discover that the UK grew by around two thirds in the two decades before we joined the EEC, but grew by only around a half in the two decades that followed. The growth rate then declined a little more for the two decades from 1992 when they “completed” the single market.

Those who seem to think leaving the single market will cause growth to slow need to explain why there was no visible boost to growth when we joined. Indeed, the completion of the single market included the worst period of the Exchange Rate Mechanism, a crucial part then of their construction of a single market, which pushed us into a nasty recession.

The latest leaked reports about slower future growth have all the reliability of those Treasury forecasts of a recession in the winter of 2016-17 which proved to be so wrong.

Mr Trump's economics

I am neither a US voter nor a Trump supporter, as I adhere to the view that it is best to stay out of other democratic country's elections. His visit to Davos was a surprise to many, given his previous views about such gatherings. His visit transformed the event into a highly newsworthy occasion. We read that the many members of the global elite and the media meeting there, mainly people who regularly express anti Trump views, were reduced to following him, seeking audience with him, trying to listen to him, and above all reporting him. So how did he do?

The President took the gathering seriously and led a large US delegation. He stuck to his mission, to make America great again. He stuck to his definition of that mission, which is to boost output, jobs and prosperity in the USA. He told the world the USA is open for business, and turned it into a global message by saying America first does not mean America alone.

Mr Trump made this trip now he has something to show for his first year in office. His economic policy has achieved a major simplification and reduction of taxes in the USA. Already a number of large companies have announced they will step up investments in the USA and pay their employees there more as a result.

His relaxation of some banking rules will help extend more credit to those wanting to invest or to bring forward major purchases which they can afford

with a loan. His energy policy is boosting US output of oil and gas. The USA should overtake Saudi Arabia soon as the largest producer in the world. It looks as if US growth will accelerate this year to above 3%.

He repeated that he wants fair as well as free trade. The USA under Obama used to impose penal tariffs on imports that they thought undercut through subsidy or cheating. Mr Trump announced similar action against solar panels and some washing machines. He is not about to wreck world trade or to seek to tear up unilaterally and illegally the trade treaties the USA has entered. He showed a continuing willingness to talk about a Free Trade Agreement with the UK. The UK government should press on with the detailed work to bring that about.

The Darkest hour

I saw this film on Saturday. It was a moving reminder of how dire the UK position was in 1940, and how brave were the people and their new Prime Minister in deciding to fight on against the odds.

The film portrayed a very human Churchill. They saw him as a man who drank too much, was often tough and thoughtless towards his staff, and who was capable of bad misjudgements. They also captured the strength of mind and character which grasped both how bad the position was, and how despite that knew ultimate victory was possible. He had consistently warned of the dangers from Germany during the 1930's and understood instinctively that you could not reach a friendly agreement with an evil dictator.

The UK establishment had once again let the country down. It had plunged it into a war with a small and insufficiently equipped army which they put at risk on the continent, just as they had done in 1914. As Churchill assumed office they told him the whole army was likely to be killed or forced to surrender. Having accomplished this dreadful feat, they switched to thinking facing defeat would be a good time to sue for peace. They thought Hitler might offer an enfeebled UK with no army a good deal, when the history of the previous few years showed you could not trust his word and should expect him to continue conquering and occupying countries including our own.

Churchill agonised over the pressures on him to seek a negotiated peace, before he realised that the public would back his belief that the only course was to fight for our freedom. Many of us are so grateful that Churchill and our parents and grandparents decided to sacrifice six years of their lives and to risk untimely death to driving the hatred and violence out of the world by defeating its authors. The film got across so well the common sense and determination of the people, in contrast to the rash stupidity of some of the establishment. It used Churchill's own wonderful words to show he spoke for the majority in a way which defeated or disarmed his many critics amongst the senior politicians and officials.