

Covid Lockdowns

I do not have a worthwhile view on the efficacy of the vaccines or of the balance of good and harm from them . I have not read enough of the literature and have no medical training . Yesterday I reported the NHS line and the questions raised by some MP s over the vaccines.I have myself raised other big issues over the way government responded to the pandemic. At the time I raised queries about the statistics presented for infections and deaths.I did not presume to advise my constituents as some non medically qualified MP s did over getting vaccinated. If asked I suggested they talked to a medical adviser they trusted.

During the covid period I did have strong views on the economic damage done by extensive lockdowns. I worked with a small group of MP s to press for Parliament to be up and running and then for the earlier return of an active in person Parliament. I saw the need for more scrutiny of the wide ranging actions being taken to direct the economy and to spend large new budgets on healthcare. I argued for concentrating protections on the vulnerable and helping them safely avoid contact with possible disease carriers, rather than getting most of us to avoid contacts outside our own family or bubble. I voted and argued for less extensive lockdowns.

I also pressed for more work on the possible approval and use of existing medicines to blunt the virus and help with symptoms for those infected. I argued for isolation hospitals to be separate from other general hospitals, for the Nightingale capacity to be used, for more use of the private sector hospitals for non covid patients, for better air flow and air cleansing in hospitals and other public buildings. I have subsequently sent in these issues for the Covid Enquiry to consider when they can spare time from examining the issues over how Ministers behaved. To produce a good report they need to examine the scientific work, forecasts , NHS management of greatly increased resource and medical advice offered as it evolved during the waves of the virus.

I have not published all contributions from yesterday. The share prices of pharmaceutical companies generally have fallen this year for a variety of reasons. The lawsuits I see raised as contributors to share declines are about infringement of patents, rather than harms from covid vaccines. Governments often issued some exemptions from liability to speed introduction of vaccines that they thought would save lives.

Governments and medical experts continue to recommend a range of covid vaccines, and have made decisions now about which ones they prefer to use. Anyone thinking of having vaccinations can now find plenty of information about side effects and about what has happened to a small proportion of people who have experienced greater harm than a sore arm and feeling a bit under the weather for a few days. Those who do dislike these vaccines can make their own decisions as they are free to do and can study outcomes so far from using these treatments.

Vaccines harm and compensation

On Friday Parliament debated the issues surrounding vaccines and in particular the various covid vaccines. Christopher Chope produced a private members bill to improve payments to anyone badly affected by vaccine. The Minister reminded the House that anyone can claim a one off £120,000 payment if they have proof of disability and harm from taking an NHS vaccine. This applies to any vaccine including one against covid. The government added the anti covid treatments to the list of those items covered. The Minister explained that the one off payment does not exclude benefit payments for disability and sickness which may be necessary for anyone badly affected by a vaccine as well as by other more usual causes of disability and ill health. The one off payment is not compensation. The Minister argued that such incidence was unusual for covid and for other approved vaccines. It is unlikely the Bill will pass as it seems that the government and the Opposition disagree with it, thinking current arrangements to make payments are sufficient subject to admin improvements to ensure prompt payment.

The Adjournment debate is a half hour debate at the end of the day's business when a single member can be allotted the time to make a case they think important and hear a Minister's reply. Andrew Bridgen secured this slot to point out that there were too many excess deaths continuing in the UK and to argue these were related to the covid vaccination of most people.

The Minister drawing on her NHS medical advice agreed that excess deaths were continuing at higher levels than before covid, but denied this resulted from the vaccinations. She argued that because 93.6% of the population had been vaccinated it was true most people dying were those who had the vaccine. It did not prove or mean the vaccine caused those deaths. Nor did she detect a lower death rate amongst the minority who had not been vaccinated. She said there was some inconclusive evidence that non vaccinated people suffered a higher death rate than vaccinated. She argued that there were a variety of causes of continuing excess deaths, including the backlog of treatments, bad outbreaks of flu, and a range of other killers running higher.

Work on the sudden death of young people from blood clots we are told has revealed a small number of cases brought on by vaccines, but we are told more people die of blood clots from contracting covid. The Opposition supported the government in the debate of the Chope Bill and made clear their belief in the efficacy and success of the vaccines administered by the NHS.

I set this out as I know some constituents and readers are concerned about these matters. I have no medical knowledge or evidence to challenge the NHS/Ministerial view that these vaccines like all such treatments adversely affected a small number of people per million injected but are not the main cause of the current continuing spate of excess deaths. I offer people the

chance to debate this further but will not publish contributions that potentially libel the NHS or drug companies based on coincidence or circumstantial evidence with no proof of causation. It was of course open to people not to take the vaccine if they did not like what was said about possible side effects, or about the balance between possible harms and possible benefits of taking it. The authorities always said there could be some side effects and put in place a reporting system to monitor them. The issue for some Health staff is different if they had to take it. Everyone was aware these vaccines were developed at pace and approved to offer some defence against the virus when understanding of it was evolving.

I followed the debate carefully but did not contribute as I do not have any special knowledge or evidence to present to disagree with the NHS view. The argument that excess deaths today result from the vaccine need to show strong evidence of more excess deaths for the vaccinated than the unvaccinated and to show causes of death are clearly linked to the vaccine impact rather than resulting from higher levels of death from a range of causes from dementia to flu.

By election messages

The main messages from the two. Y elections are that many Conservative voters do not like what the government is doing or not doing, nor do they want to vote Labour.

The secondary message is if frustrated Conservatives vote Reform they can tip the balance between a Conservative and a Labour MP but they are miles off winning a seat even in by election conditions.

It confirms my view that the government needs to cut taxes urgently, control spending better, make a substantial reduction in legal migration and follow through on its pro drivers pro personal freedoms policies.

My second Intervention on the Energy Bill

I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Did he notice that the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) would not give way? She was arguing—the typical position of her party—that it knew all the answers before the consultation, yet it still wanted a very long, drawn-out consultation to

avoid doing the answers.

Andrew Bowie, (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Nuclear and Networks):

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. I also noticed that—
We cannot respond to a consultation that has not been launched yet. We are in the process right now of working with the community energy contact group. In fact, it has already met. Work is under way right now to develop the consultation, identify what the barriers to market are, and get out there and support the community energy sector, as the Government are determined to do. Lib Dem's specialise in expensive consultations which they then ignore if they do not agree with the public views sent in. Hobhouse said they knew the answers so why propose a consultation? Why would we trust them to accept the replies when they have made up their minds?

My Intervention on the Energy Bill

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

One of the barriers will be the shortage of grid and cable capacity to link into. Is the hon. Gentleman envisaging some kind of privileged access or some solution to the grid shortage?

Dr Whitehead (Shadow Minister for Climate and Net Zero):

That is not quite the subject of our debate, but the right hon. Member can see that we envisage an energetic and far-reaching proposal to develop the grid in such a way that those grid shortages are overcome, so that the grid is able to service the low carbon economy in the way we would all want it to do. In the context of what we are discussing, I remind the right hon. Member that this would be about distributed grids at a local level, rather than the national high-level grids. We need to take further action to strengthen and sort out grids at that level.

The Lords clearly continue to feel strongly about this issue; as we can see, they have sent back to us today a modified version of the original amendment, requiring the Government to consult on changes to assist community energy and, importantly, to set a timeline for proposals to be brought forward to remove barriers to the development of community energy.

Of course, there are others in this House who feel strongly about this issue. The proposals that the Lords have now twice tried to have inserted into the Bill are essentially the wording of a group called Power for the People, which suggested wording for a community energy enabling Bill for which it campaigned to secure signed-up support from parliamentarians. It did indeed secure substantial support from parliamentarians who feel strongly on the issue of community energy. Some 325 Members signed up in support, including 130 Conservative Members and, perhaps most remarkably, 22 members of the Government, including six Treasury Ministers, the present Chancellor and the

Minister himself, as I often seek to remind him. There is no lack of support in the House for the principles and practice of community energy.

The Lords amendment seeks to acknowledge and further that support by putting forward very reasonable and, one might have thought, pretty non-contentious wording to add to the Bill. It is inexplicable to me that the Government should seek to resist these proposals in the way they have. Yes, they will say, as the Minister has said, that they have set up a community energy fund of £10 million over two years, which is welcome, and they have verbally indicated that, at some stage, there will be a consultation on barriers to supply, but there are no timelines for that and no commitment to move positively forward from it. That is what this amendment seeks to put right.

As I have said, the Minister appears already to be a signed-up supporter of community energy action, and I would fear for his own emotional wellbeing if he were forced today to perform another policy backflip and acquiesce in yet another Government repudiation of themselves in rejecting this latest Lords amendment. Instead, let us end the extended passage of the Bill on a high note, and all around the House agree on both the importance of community energy and the measures we will need to take to ensure it thrives in the future.