

The state of the leadership race

I find it odd to read that Rishi is attracting the vote of careerist MPs who think he is the establishment figure who will win and give them jobs. That cannot be right, as the polls all show he will lose if he is one of any two candidates in the final round with the members. We must conclude that there is a significant body of Conservative MPs who agree with him that we need higher taxes and especially higher business taxes and who think as he does that you can get faster growth from here whilst hiking taxes. That is not a winning strategy either for the country or for the candidate.

I do not know if they all appreciate that Rishi in government did not want us to move away from EU single market regulations for fear of retaliation over trade by the EU. They may not know he was against legislating on the Northern Ireland Protocol as he also feared the EU response. He did not want to legislate to make clear we can fix VAT rates in Northern Ireland as well as the rest of the UK. He did not want to cut VAT on energy, accepting continuing EU constraints on our freedom of tax action. He did not roll out the Freeports he argued so eloquently for on the backbenches for the first day of our exit, and did not want to give them decent tax breaks to make them really attractive. He had to be persuaded to help people with a package of financial support this year to deal with surging energy prices.

Most people think today will be about MPs deciding or getting closer to deciding which of the remaining four candidates should stand against Rishi, though Rishi himself still needs a few more MP votes to ensure a place in the final two. I urge Rishi supporters to think again. I expect Tom Tugendhat to come last this time and drop out. He has performed well and attracted support from people who want a fresh start led by someone who has never held Ministerial office. I think it is asking too much of someone to think they come in mid Parliament to the complexities of Ministerial life without the thorough preparation most people have by being in a senior government position before becoming PM. In the case of a Leader of the Opposition winning a General election who has not been a past Minister they come in after years of planning how to run a government advised by people in their party who have done it in the past. Tom has offered us a ten year Plan to be worked out later. We need a plan for the first ten days from September 6th as we need urgent action to tackle the cost of living crisis.