

Why I will vote against the government's CV 19 law

I was glad to see the government yesterday reported cases in hospital and deaths from CV19 have been falling. It seems that Plan A, persuade most people to get the vaccine, is working. So why the need for some new measures?

The Secretary of State told us that though there are only a few hundred Omicron cases in the U.K. they guess there are in practice 10,000 already. If that is so then the lower hospital cases is even more significant. They say Omicron cases are doubling quickly, but most people with it are not seriously ill or have no symptoms.

I disagree that people should have to show vaccination proof to go to an event or a night club. I disagree with people being told to work from home. People now have three options to manage their risk of catching covid. They can take a vaccine which greatly cuts the chances of getting a serious version of it. They can decide to avoid crowded places and observe prudent distancing in what they do. They can agree homeworking with their employer where that works for both parties. They can decide to take the risk, as we do for most other diseases that we can catch from other people.

It is time to move on from worry about the virus. Trust people to make their own decisions about how to handle the risk.

Saving lives in the Channel

The government wants to stop people trafficking and smuggling from France. Its Border Force has been unable to carry out the Home Secretary's wishes and deter or turn back the small boats. The government is now legislating to strengthen its powers to send people back who do not qualify as asylum seekers.

I sponsored Bill Cash's amendment to the Bill. We were worried that U.K. courts might refuse to implement the law, claiming that European Human Rights or the UN migrant Convention prevented them from doing so. We proposed a simple amendment to clarify that the U.K. law means what it says notwithstanding any ECHR or UN interpretations.

The government refused to accept the amendment and Opposition parties were against it. The government promised to bring forward proposals to amend the Human Rights laws urgently, implying they agreed with our fears concerning this Bill.

It is a pity they did not just accept the amendment. The danger now is the courts will seek to undermine government borders policy yet again.

My question to the Minister at Justice and the Home Office querying how the Government's Nationality and Borders Bill, unamended, would tackle people smuggling.

John Redwood:

If the legislation is carried in the way the [Minister](#) wishes, what impact will it have on the awful, vile trade through small boats? Will it stop it? Is there a danger that the UK courts will overturn the intent?

Tom Pursglove, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Ministry of Justice and Home Office):

The measures in the Bill are significant. We have recognised—the Home Secretary has consistently recognised this and I recognise it as the [Minister](#) responsible for tackling illegal immigration—that the asylum system in this country is currently broken. The length of time it takes to process claims is unacceptable and we need to improve the situation. The Government's intention is clearly stated: to improve the way we process claims. We expect individuals who seek to claim asylum in this country to comply with the requirements, but of course safety nets are in place, for good reasons, so that it will be taken appropriately into account if people cannot meet the deadlines. We believe that progressing on the basis of processing claims more quickly and removing those with no right to be here will make quite a significant difference. Importantly, it is also about the work that we do not just with our nearest neighbours in, for example, France and Belgium—that collaboration is important and is delivering results, and we want to secure a returns agreement that will help to build on that—but further upstream in removing those with no right to be here back to source countries.

My Question to the Minister for Health asking what reassessment he has made of the cost of the reorganisation of clinical commissioning groups

John Redwood:

To ask the [Secretary of State](#) for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the cost of the reorganisation of clinical commissioning groups.

Edward Argar, Minister of State (Department of Health and Social Care):

There has been no specific assessment. [NHS England](#) and [NHS Improvement](#) are providing guidance and support during the abolition of clinical commissioning groups and the establishment of integrated care boards. NHS England and NHS Improvement are managing changes required to adapt software and processes managed by third-party suppliers and we expect these costs to be absorbed within NHS England's budgets.

Ukraine and Nord Stream 2

The EU protests against Russia's seizure of Crimea. The EU says it does not want Russia taking any more of Ukraine. At the same time Germany encourages Russia to put in Nord Stream 2, a second direct pipeline from Russia to Germany to increase German and EU dependence on Russian gas. It also provides a way of diverting gas that might otherwise have flowed through a pipe across Ukraine, with revenues accruing to Ukraine, to a different route and no Ukrainian revenues. For Russia Nord Stream 2 is a double win, weakening the EU and Ukraine at the same time.

Both Germany and the EU are delaying signature on the regulatory arrangements and the contracts to supply gas via the pipeline. They are trying to place more of it under EU law. That will not of course make much difference should Russia at some date in the future decide to use the leverage it could exert from being a major gas supplier to the EU to demand concessions or changes of policy to its liking. For the legal route to work the other side both has to accept the jurisdiction of the EU court and to willingly submit to the views of the other party in the dispute. Russia would not necessarily do that in practice whatever the initial documents might say.

The SPD led new German coalition government includes the Greens and is meant

to be taking the faster pursuit of net zero seriously. Greens do not usually welcome new sources of fossil fuel delivery. I guess in this case they will be so hard pressed to find ways of implementing their new pledge to try to phase coal out of their electricity generation by 2030 that they will not think they can do without this extra gas as well.

Today President Biden will have a video conference with President Putin. Ukraine will doubtless be high up the agenda. The USA has told the world of a build up of Russian troops near Ukraine's eastern border. One of the many things Presidents Biden and Trump agree about is the undesirability of Nord Stream 2. As it gets close to going ahead President Biden will need to find ways to warn Russia off using Ukraine's greater weakness to his advantage.