

Returning from Peru

I have raised with the FCO the issue of what more they can do to organise exit flights from Peru for UK nationals wishing to return home. I have followed it up again today but have not yet had a reply. Several constituents have asked me about this.

Going out

People are mainly sociable. Most of us enjoy company, and like leisure pursuits based on sport or culture, dining out or drinking, adventure or romance.

The decision to ban these leaves a big hole in people's lives. Governments have to allow people to go out to buy food, so the trips to the supermarket become more frequent as they represent one of the few reasons to allow people to go out as they wish.

The pressures on the supermarkets are mainly from the demand side. There are five principal reasons

1. Some have to buy more food more often because we are no longer eating in works canteens or attending working meals when working from home. Many people have to replace missed meals out with home cooking. This means food that used to go to wholesalers for the catering trade now needs to be diverted to supermarkets. This must now be happening and will help. Supermarket models of true demand need adjusting for the increased home meals effects. There is no overall increase in food demand.
2. Some people have decided to greatly increase their stocks of food. Some have cleaned the stores out of new freezers to increase their storage capacity. Some have written unhelpful articles telling people what can be frozen, to swell the phenomenon. Most saw this as anti social and refrained, but a significant minority cleared whole shelves of items they liked .
3. The government's stronger guidance on 7 and 14 day isolation at home, and long term isolation for the elderly and ill, led more people to feel they had to lay in food for a longer stay at home, which increased the number of people building abnormal stock piles.
4. The media fanned hoarding by highlighting empty shelves at periods of the day furthest from the restock deliveries, to encourage a feeding frenzy.
5. The statement that one of the few legitimate reasons to go out is to buy food meant people became likely to do it more often. Having got there they proceed to buy things they cannot eat anytime soon.

The government and supermarkets need to agree a tougher approach to limiting purchases, so we deter people from further large stock build. Once this can be achieved supply and demand should come into better balance, reducing the tensions and showing people we are not about to run out of food. Astute farmers will be watching all this and see an opportunity to plant and rear more food this spring and summer given the appetite for it.

My Parliamentary office staff

I have been told that a few people have been aggressive with my staff who are trying to provide answers at a time of great demand. Please understand they are trying to do their best for you. Keep your anger for a strong email to me or the government if you must let off steam about the current difficult situation.

Dear Constituent

This is not the letter I wanted to be writing to you this Spring. I had been working hard on an agenda with the government to boost our economy, speed up our growth, create more better paid jobs and improve public facilities in Wokingham. We were making progress when the virus struck.

Now I have to report to you that the economy will shrink substantially as a result of the measures being put in place to combat the epidemic. I am only too well aware that many of you are now experiencing severe difficulties in your businesses, with activity drying up or with the business effectively closed by cancellation of events, eating out, tourism and the rest.

I have switched my main activity to pressing for a comprehensive economic package to keep more people in jobs and to mitigate the worst of the impact of the enforced closures and big decline in demand in many areas. I am pleased that the Bank of England under a new Governor is working closely with the government and has come up with major injections of cash and support to the banking system so commercial banks have the means to help their customers through a difficult time. I have asked for a wide range of financial measures to support business and the self employed, with the stress on grants rather than loans where businesses have lost much of their revenue through no fault of their own. I welcome the emphasis on trying to avoid redundancies, as businesses need to keep talented teams together ready for the upturn when restrictions are lifted on normal life. Yesterday's measures help but do not do enough for the self employed in particular.

I am very conscious that the government has no election mandate for the economic measures it has taken with the purpose of cutting the spread of the virus. Indeed, they are the opposite of what we wished to do and talked about doing. So far I find a minority of you think the government should be taking more and tougher measures, whilst another minority think the fear of the virus is overdone and we should treat it more like winter flu and let it run its course. The majority seem to be in support of the government's tightening of controls as the virus started to spread, to seek to limit the strains on the NHS. I am urging the government to proceed only with measures which command cross party support. The government's chosen way of battling the virus is to limit human contact to limit spread. This requires buy in from most people to succeed, so it cannot be done with just one main political party support where a significant constituency in the country fundamentally disagrees. The government is following an international consensus on how to respond, and drawing on evidence and guidance from the World Health Organisation.

The government is taking emergency powers, which include the right to quarantine individuals who are carrying the disease, and the power to prevent public gatherings. There are also powers to direct and flex the health and schools sectors to meet the extraordinary requirements on healthcare. These powers expire after 2 years. Some in Labour have been suggesting they should be reviewed and only if necessary continued for a second year after one year. I am urging the government to accept that sensible advice.

I am posting on this website relevant communications from the government that might help people with difficult problems created by the new circumstances. In general terms the position is as follows

1. People caught abroad. The FCO has promised to work with the national governments involved to organise ways back home for all UK citizens wishing to return soon. They should contact the UK Embassy or Consulate near to them who will know if and when this can be organised in their case.
2. Self employed and businesses starved of customers and cash. Various grants, tax holidays and tax deferrals are listed on government websites and [here](#). We await the details of yesterday afternoon's package which I will also post, which was designed to put more help into business to ward off redundancies.
3. People's right to a school place within the reduced educational provision. The list of occupations which qualify parents for places at school for their children has been published, based on the need of the parents to work away from home to maintain essential services. The list of key workers is available to view [here](#).
4. Food supply. There is plenty of food available to feed us all. There have been temporary shortages on the shelves of supermarkets pending extra deliveries. This has mainly been brought about by some people deciding to fill freezers and store cupboards with an unusually large reserve which leaves the shops temporarily empty for customers who need an evening meal. At some point presumably the freezers will be full and demand will return to more normal levels. It would be neighbourly for

people not to do this, and great if people who have stocked up now kept away from the shops and used some of their stocks. Informal rationing is being operated by the supermarkets, who are doing a wonderful job in difficult circumstances. If there are too many empty shelves too often they will need to tighten the ration rules.

I wish you all success in avoiding or overcoming the virus yourselves and in your families. I and my staff will help where you need assistance with government rules or think government can do something to improve the situation. None of us have all the answers to this new disease which so far evades treatment and vaccination. Government policy is changing at pace and it sometimes takes a little time for the detail and implementation to catch up.

The best advice I can give is commonsense. Try to avoid contact with anyone outside your immediate family at home as anyone may be carrying the virus or you may yourself be doing so. Behave towards others as if you did have the virus by keeping a respectful distance. Look after the vulnerable in your family. Buy what you need, but be mindful of the needs of others. This is a time when communities can come together to help each other. It is a time where if you have the capacity it would be great to help those in need, and for local and voluntary efforts to emerge to take some of the strain. Lonely people in isolation would appreciate safe communications by social media or phone.

Yours sincerely

John Redwood

[My intervention during the Economic Update from the Chancellor, 17 March 2020](#)

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I am delighted that the Chancellor recognises the need for burden-sharing on employment costs in badly affected sectors such as tourism, travel and hospitality, but will he also make sure that there is a package for the self-employed, because some of those people are losing a large amount of their business, too?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Rishi Sunak): My right hon. Friend has written about the importance of employment support, and I look forward to getting his thoughts on those measures.