

August Newsletter - John Cryer MP

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Dear resident,

I hope that you managed to enjoy the summer in spite of the pandemic.

Parliament being in recess has not prevented the Government from courting catastrophe again and the public airing of criticism by normally loyal backbench Tory MPs speaks volumes about its performance. It is indeed "government by U-turn" and from it stems a crisis of confidence which a country dealing with an emergency can ill afford.

Results chaos and schools' return

One of the government's more prominent about turns was of course over A-levels, GCSEs and BTECs, where the government was forced to abandon the results algorithm it had already been told would produce unfair outcomes in favour of teacher-determined grades. The result was chaos for university admissions, disappointment for many prospective students and a loss of faith in the whole system.

My office has been busy dealing with the fallout and trying to provide assistance to worried, anxious and angry students and parents.

I made urgent representations to the Education Secretary and have been in discussions with Ofqual. I have spoken to principals and heads from local schools and colleges. At such an uncertain and anxious time for many I made my office accessible to any student who needed my help with their appeals. I have written to many Vice-chancellors and College Principals in support of my constituents.

Many parents will be anxious about their children returning to school. For many younger children the experience of school will be disquietingly different from what they are used to, whilst secondary age students will face greater challenges to maintain safe social distance. Children's education can no longer be put on hold, and teachers will be doing their absolute best to keep children safe while providing as normal a school experience and as full an education as possible. But the buck ultimately stops at the Department for Education to provide guidance on Covid-safety, and they have already been found wanting in respect of clarity with yet more confusion regarding the wearing of masks.

The end of furlough

We are now two months from the end of the Job Retention Scheme, and the spectre of mass unemployment is looming large. We are already seeing frequent announcements of sizeable redundancies as the Government's contribution to furlough pay reduces at a rate of 10% per month. As Frances O'Grady has commented, many businesses which may go to the wall if support is cut off as planned would be perfectly viable if they can find their way to the other side of social distancing.

The government is being too prescriptive and risks making a monumental mistake which will affect huge numbers of people locally, given that we have had among the highest rate of furloughed workers by constituency.

Climate and Ecological Bill

I have long argued for rapid action on this issue as the next two or three years will be crucial.

Climate disaster is happening here and now. Yet while Parliament declared an environment and climate emergency in May last year, our government are simply not responding as the situation requires.

The Government maintains that it intends to green the UK economy and that it is taking steps to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. But as the Committee on Climate Change's (whom I have met with) most recent progress report makes clear, the gulf between the government's

rhetoric on climate action and the reality is vast. Not only are Ministers set to miss the 2050 target that Parliament legislated for just over a year ago, they are not even on track to meet the less ambitious one that preceded it.

As such, I support the broad aims set out in the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill which is simply a presentation Bill and therefore is not subject to debate or votes and does not contain the sort of detail one would expect if it was likely to get onto the statute book (this is not a criticism of Caroline Lucas, just a reference to one of the quirks of parliamentary procedure).

US Presidential election and social unrest

You will, I am sure, have been as concerned as me by both the violent clashes we have seen between pro-Trump “vigilantes” and anti-racism protestors in the USA, and the cynicism with which the president has stoked racial tensions to boost his own electoral prospects. Sadly, it appears that he has had a measure of success in so doing and November’s poll is not the sure thing it was at one time widely perceived to be.

Trump has made an awful mess of the pandemic and Americans have suffered terribly as a result. In addition their global standing has taken a nosedive, and divisions in society have widened massively. When he thought he was going to lose he went to great lengths to undermine faith in the democratic system, and he is now manipulating the fears, insecurities and prejudices of Middle America to win a second term. This man is a demagogue and a narcissist, and his improving re-election prospects are surely among the most worrying developments in global politics.