

CORONA CRISIS: FIGHTBACK IS ON...

QUESTIONS ON THE TORY DONOR NOW ADVISING ON LOANS

BY ANDY BUCKWELL
MPS are demanding to know why a Tory donor who runs a firm investing in troubled companies has been hired as a Government adviser on how coronavirus business loans should be dished out.

The move has led to accusations that Chancellor Rishi Sunak's appointment of ex-boss Richard Sharp could cause a potential "conflict of interest". The former City banker is chairman at RoundShield, a firm that makes money helping struggling firms get access to cash. One financial expert told us: "The appointment will give him a privileged insight into the market where his business operates - as well as knowledge of government thinking competitors would love. "I believe it is a conflict of interest." Ex-shadow chancellor John McDon-

» Rishi mentor: » 'Conflict of interest' storm is lender chief

nell is among MPs infuriated by the move. He said: "It is an extraordinary ministerial decision and needs explaining how on earth it cannot represent a serious conflict of interest." Multi-millionaire Mr Sharp, 64, has donated £400,000 to the Tory Party in the past. He is on the board of right wing think tank the Centre for Policy Studies. He also owns 7% in a drugs company linked to the testing of potential coronavirus vaccines. He was Mr Sunak's boss and mentor when the Chancellor worked as a banker at Goldman Sachs. His new unpaid role will involve sorting out

the chaotic Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans Scheme (CBILS) which has so far dished out cash to just 5,000 firms forced to furlough staff or stop trading, despite 300,000 inquiries. It's not the first time Mr Sharp - once an advisor to Boris Johnson as London mayor - has been caught up in controversy. In 2014, he was appointed to the Bank of England's powerful Financial Policy Committee (FPC) - and then joined RoundShield, fuelling questions over a conflict of interest. He also attended a Tory fundraising party weeks after assuring parliament he would not let past political connections compromise his independence. Mr Sharp has taken temporary leave from RoundShield while in his new role. A spokesman said the firm would not be a lender to the CBILS. The Treasury did not comment but a source said: "A conflict of interest policy is being followed."

BANKERS Rishi Sunak, far right, and former boss Richard Sharp



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We must act on what last 10yrs have taught us

COMMENT

BY ANNELESE DODDS
SHADOW CHANCELLOR

MANY families are living through extremely turbulent times, worried about the health of their family and friends - but also about the future of their jobs. We need a clear and robust strategy to protect our economy and, above all, people's livelihoods. Labour backed the creation of the schemes in the Government's economic support package. But now the Government must get more of a grip and ensure money is getting to where it is desperately needed. I have written to Chancellor Rishi Sunak outlining several major issues with the schemes. Many employers have refused to "furlough" workers, even though the Government would have covered the costs of wages. The future of the furlough scheme is unknown beyond June, even though deadlines for consultation on redundancy are fast approaching. The Business Interruption Loan Scheme does not seem to be getting to small businesses where cash flow is desperately needed. And for those who have already been made redundant, there is a two-week wait to obtain a loan from Universal Credit, which threatens to push many into debt.

UNDERPAID

Immediate government support is essential to help people now - but it is also critical for our future recovery. The more jobs lost now, and the more businesses that go bust, the harder it will be for our economy to build back up after this crisis. We also need to learn from what has happened in our country over the past 10 years. Wages have stagnated during most of this time and living standards failed to substantially improve. Meanwhile, the top rate of income tax and corporation tax rates for profitable firms were cut. Slashing spending after the financial crisis led to a slower and weaker recovery in the UK than in many other countries. When we start to exit this crisis, we must face up to the challenge of rebuilding our public services. Hospital porters, cleaners, transport workers and delivery drivers are among those keeping the UK going - but for far too long their work has been underpaid, undervalued and insecure. A better future is possible when this crisis is over. To build that future, we will have to learn the lessons of the past - not least about the impact of starving our public services of resources.

BUT WILL WE LEARN THE LESSONS?

Trump rant sends the US flocking to beaches

BY KAREN ROCKETT

THOUSANDS of Americans are hitting the beach after Donald Trump urged some state governors to lift lockdowns. Crowds charged onto the sands in Jacksonville, Florida, as the state saw its highest increase yet in coronavirus cases, up by 1,421 on Friday to 24,753. Seaside filled up

on both east and west coasts after the President urged supporters to "liberate" three states led by rival democrats. His words were said to be encouraging protests against stay-at-home restrictions. Washington Governor Jay Inslee slammed them as "unhinged rantings" and "illegal and dangerous

trade, economic and financial measures in order to minimise disruptions and recover stronger". Singapore yesterday reported a new daily record of 942 infections that saw its total surge to 5,992. And Japan's infection rate rose by 556 to more than 10,000. Covid-19 is just getting under way in Africa, but has killed over 1,000.

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VACCINE HOPE

BY DAN WARBURTON

A VACCINE trial on humans is set to begin within days as British scientists lead the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

And the tests could be completed by mid-August, said a key government advisor. But Professor Sir John Bell, of the vaccine task force, warned we could face a longer wait before a treatment was publicly available. Leading immunologist Sir John said: "If we can see evidence of a strong immune response by the middle or end of May, I think the game is on. Then there is the massive issue of how you manufacture many billions of doses." Human testing of a potential vaccine is due to be carried out across

» Human trials start in the UK next week

» Scientists aiming for release in August

the UK this week by a team of experts from Oxford University. Called the Recovery trial, it's the world's biggest and takes in 150 hospitals with up to 400 people taking part. They will test the effectiveness of four different drugs. These include hydroxychloroquine - a less toxic form of the anti-malaria drug chloroquine - an anti-inflammatory drug, a steroid and an antiretroviral drug normally used to treat HIV. Similar trials in the US and Europe have a few hundred patients in total. A second expert, Prof Peter Horby,

added: "The UK is leading the global fight against the pandemic. We've set up this trial in record time. "It's the biggest trial in the world and realistically by June or July we will get a very clear signal if the drugs are effective." **WARNED** Drug companies and universities across the globe are racing to develop a Covid-19 vaccine. There are at least 62 separate efforts currently under way, according to the World Health Organisation. But

despite rising hopes of a breakthrough, Prof Will Irving, a virologist from Nottingham University, warned: "Until you try a vaccine, you don't know whether it's going to work or not. You can only prove that a vaccine works by carrying out appropriate clinical trials. "There is a history of trials showing absolutely no effect. "There are even some historical trials where the vaccine not only didn't prevent the disease, it actually made it worse. "With the best of intentions, you

don't know until you put it into trial. At a time of an epidemic like this, you could do it reasonably quickly." Meanwhile, other health chiefs warned it will be difficult to eliminate Covid-19 completely. Dr Chris Smith, consultant clinical virologist at Cambridge University, said there was a widespread opinion that Covid-19 has "a really high prospect" of becoming another circulating coronavirus causing seasonal infections and cold-like symptoms. But he said more severe outbreaks could be rare cases "because by the time that presumably happens the vast majority of us will have become immune to it. "Either either because a vaccine has been invented or because we have become naturally infected with it." dan.warburton@sundaymirror.co.uk

M&S is probing supplier safety

EXCLUSIVE BY LEE SORRELL AND DAN WARBURTON

HERE are workers who produce prepared greens for Marks & Spencer just inches apart at smoking shelters. Our exclusive pictures were taken at Tilmanstone Salads in Dover, Kent, where one worker said: "We're really worried hygiene and social distancing measures are not being properly enforced." Government rules say firms should encourage staggered staff breaks so social distancing can be maintained. Last night M&S said it expected suppliers to implement Government guidance. It said: "We take any allegations of this nature very seriously and are investigating these claims. All our suppliers must adhere to our ethical standards as a condition of working with us." Factory owners Bakkavor said: "We expect everyone on our sites to follow these protocols. All the provisions are in place for colleagues to follow." Yesterday it was claimed some shops in Sir Philip Green's Arcadia clothing group, which is discussing leases with landlords, may shut permanently because of the virus. Arcadia, Topshop's owner, did not comment. And unions fear 300 telesales and customer service jobs at online retailer ASOS's Watford call centre, Herts, will go abroad. ASOS refused to comment.



TOO CLOSE Factory staff stand near each other on a cigarette break despite Government distancing guidelines



HORRIFIED Julia Bradbury wants to stop animal sellers

TV's Julia: End wild animal markets

BY AMY SHARPE

TV presenter Julia Bradbury has said that she is horrified at the reopening of China's meat markets. The former Countryfile host and campaigner told the Sunday Mirror: "It is far too soon." Over 3,600 stalls are operating again at Baishizhou market in Wuhan, Central China, the city where

the coronavirus originated. Shocked Julia, 49, said: "It seems utterly ludicrous to be taking risks with any sort of wildlife markets." The World Health Organisation approved the reopening of Baishizhou, though trade of wild live animals and poultry at the market is still banned. Wuhan's Huanan Seafood Wholesale

Market, where Covid-19 is said to have originated, had remained shut since January 1. But last week we revealed how the wet market trade in Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia has continued. Conservationist Julia, who runs walking website The Outdoor Guide, has backed the Sunday Mirror's calls to urgently end the trade of wild animals.

She said: "The positive of this pandemic is it has shone a light on these markets that many of us hadn't heard about. Now we've seen it for ourselves." Julia, who has son Zephyr, 8, and twin girls Zena and Xanthe, five, added: "These places send a shiver down my spine. It is animal cruelty and lack of compassion for other living creatures."