

Marginal Gains

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Politicians don't need to be competent to be popular



By Lauren Webb

If the pandemic is at all reflective of public mood in the UK, it has shown that the public do not necessarily require politicians to be competent. Irrespective of background, honesty or competency, it is the ability of a politician to project empathy that seems to determine success.

Old Etonian Boris Johnson has done well to empathise with the population in this pandemic. His struggles with coronavirus, the birth of his son and his openness on the government's issues in dealing with the pandemic have struck a chord with the public. Clapping along with us every Thursday, Boris has somehow proved he understands the struggles of the nation.

Hence, his government has managed

to maintain a relatively high 68% approval rating throughout the pandemic according to a 14th April YouGov poll. The PM's personal popularity is equally high: a 13th April YouGov poll indicated a 66% approval rating.

This is despite various fiascos: the lack of PPE, the incompetency demonstrated by using the RAF to fly unusable PPE in from Turkey, the government's inability to roll out mass testing, and an appalling death toll.

The public's approval of the government has also echoed the suggestion of December 2019 that the public do not mind a few mistruths. Sir Keir Starmer was right to point out in his debut that the

government was wrong to describe their response as 'an apparent success' and the contradictory nature of the government approach towards international comparisons. Yet the public's approval rating indicates they are tolerant of lies.

This is a good rebound for the Conservatives considering the preceding years can be characterised by the inability of politicians to connect with the public, correlating to falling popularity. Theresa May made her 'just about managing' speech. Corbyn went to Glastonbury. Yet neither politician managed to succeed in proving to the public they understood in the way Boris has. Consequently, neither enjoyed the success Johnson is currently enjoying.

Why does the government censor its scientific advice?

By Katy Scott

During this Covid-19 lockdown the UK public's trust and adherence is overwhelmingly important, so why are they censoring SAGE reports? The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, commonly known as SAGE, is a supposedly independent group that provides scientific and technical advice to support government decision making. However, its report was heavily redacted with over half blacked out from the public, causing growing discomfort from scientific advisers. Surely at this frightening time clarity and communication is needed, to ensure the government keeps public support throughout this crisis?

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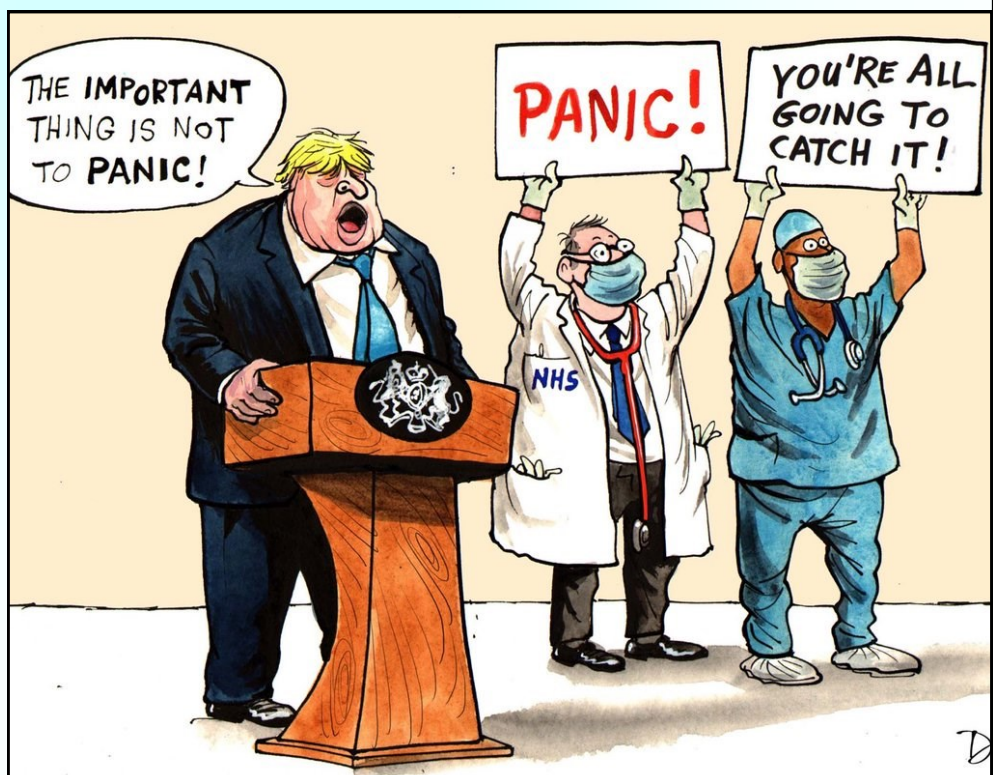
The government seems to be hiding from criticism, being secretive about the science of Covid-19. Its lack of transparency was described as 'reminiscent of Stalinist Russia. Not a good look' by Stephen Reicher, a professor of social psychology at the University of St Andrews. The suggested reason for the report's redaction was because some of SAGE's advice contradicted government policy and guidelines, which possibly could have sparked criticism from the public.

SAGE's independence also appears to be coming under threat. Boris Johnson's chief advisor or 'puppet master', Dominic Cummings, has been attending these meetings,



raising questions of its political neutrality. His attendance could suggest that policies are based more on a political agenda than scientific advice. Furious over censorship with fears mounting about a loss of independence, members of SAGE are

threatening to step down, adding fuel to the fire. With Boris' government relying on public backing and dedication to the tight lockdown rules, the risk of distrust has more consequences than ever.



The government, not charity, should fund the NHS

By Emily Baker

With the 'new normal' that the country has settled into, where flour and toilet roll has replaced the national currency and social interactions with those other than family being limited to online, acts of kindness such as the Run for Heroes, clapping the NHS on Thursdays and donating to Captain Tom's Campaign, who has raised millions for the NHS just seem like the right things to do. It appears a noble, valiant way for everyone to play a part in defeating the virus. I completely admire the work of heroes such as Captain Tom due to his generosity and commitment to help NHS frontline staff.

However, the NHS is not a charity, it is a national organisation. Part of the government's job should be to prepare for situations like these, ensure the welfare of NHS workers and provide PPE. PPE is an essential life-saving tool, it should not be

funded by ordinary people clubbing together. This undermines the principle that the NHS is something that everyone should take responsibility for through taxation. Charity fundraising should not have to fill in a system that can no longer cope after governments have cut back provision.

'PPE is an essential life-saving tool, it should not be funded by ordinary people clubbing together'

Funding the NHS should come out of a properly planned and resourced budget that is accountable to the government, because we are all still going to need the NHS after this is all over and charity support has dwindled. The Duke of Westminster has received praise for donating £12.5 million to NHS charities. However, perhaps you should keep in

mind that his £10 billion fortune is partly due to the fact he has benefitted from UK tax laws. Under a different, more progressive tax system he could have donated significantly more than the £12.5 million that he is being applauded for.

There are many other charities that are massively underfunded at the moment due to lack of ability to fundraise under lockdown. Some of these are providing vital frontline services but are not government funded. This includes Hospices, Mental Health charities and those that support people dealing with domestic abuse. Arguably, these are more in need of rescuing during this crisis. The greatest contribution all the people clapping on Thursday night could make to the NHS is perhaps at the ballot box.



Life under Lockdown

By Greg Cook



The UK was plunged into a state of lockdown on the 23 March 2020 in an unprecedented step to attempt to limit the spread of the Coronavirus. Life under lockdown has presented many new challenges which were unexpected and changes that have been put in place in order to ensure that the safety of our population and society is preserved.

The education system has been heavily impacted by the spread of the virus and the consequential lockdown as schools and colleges have been forced to close due to the risk of the spread of infection. In an attempt to recreate a classroom atmosphere and format most effectively many schools and colleges have opted to use

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technology such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom, thus enabling a closer interaction between the teacher and their pupils to be possible. Understandably, as a result of the new format of teaching, the appropriate workload (whether too much or too little), screen time and the amount of exercise and activity that pupils and teachers alike are getting are issues that have arisen in

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these unprecedented times. Issues surrounding mental health have become even more prevalent as the importance of a routine has been emphasised as it would be so easy to lose track of days and time which experts say would be immensely damaging to one's overall mental condition.

Overall however, the nation appears to be stronger than ever as we all eagerly await the next announcement from the Prime Minister on the severity of the virus at that moment in time which in turn would affect the length of lockdown which we must all endure if we are to prevail from this.



Does Sweden know best?

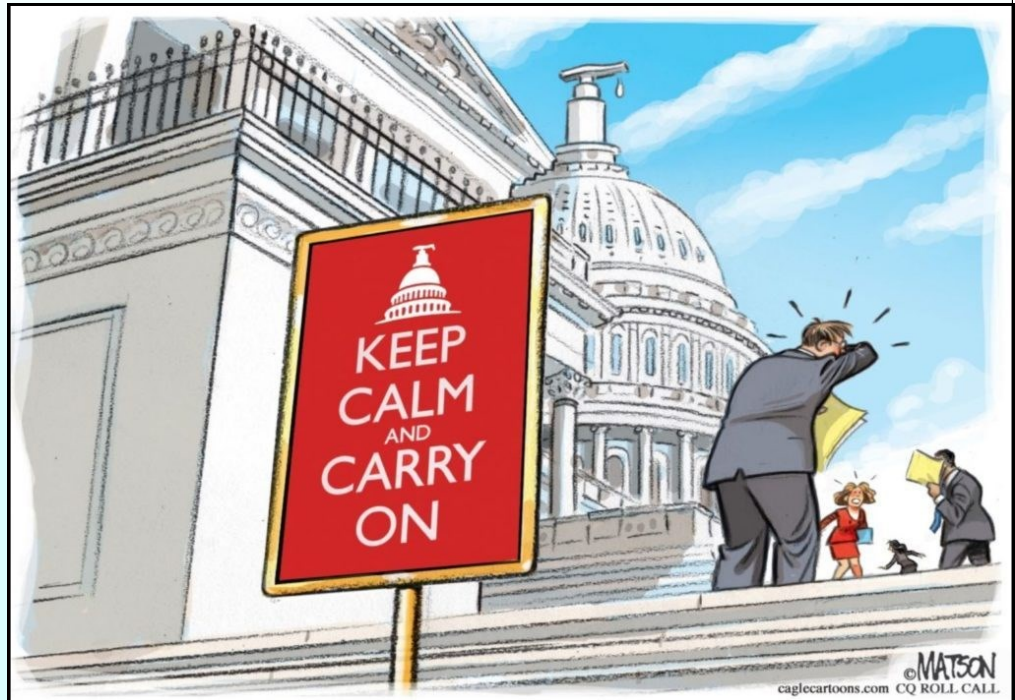
By Max Penney

Sweden has taken a noticeably hands-off approach when attempting to handle the coronavirus crisis. Sweden has bucked a worldwide trend and gone against WHO advice in refusing to enforce a nationwide lockdown like the rest of Europe. Sweden's strategy means schools are open for under-16s, businesses remain operating and cafes, bars, gyms and cinemas all remain open as normal.

The only noticeable restrictions on everyday life are a ban on care home visits, and online teaching for sixth form and university classes. Instead of enforcing a lockdown and policing the public, the Swedish government has simply asked citizens to do the right thing and ensure they respect social distancing guidelines, work from home if they can and wash their hands frequently.

There is considerable debate as to whether Sweden's strategy has really worked. Sweden currently has the 14th highest death tally in the world, and as of Saturday 8th May has recorded 3,040 deaths, despite having a population of only 10.4 million. However, its hospitals have been able to cope, unlike many other countries in Europe. Compared with other countries in Scandinavia, Sweden's virus death rate at 301 per million is considerably higher than Norway's at 40 deaths per million or Finland's at 46 deaths per million, but it is also far lower than other major European countries who have enforced strict lockdowns like Italy, the UK and Spain.

The relationship between Swedish authorities and the people is one that is very unique, and is the key reason as to why the country's death rates haven't sky rocketed despite no enforced lockdown. Most Swedes tend to comply with public health advice, for example, child vaccinations are only a



recommendation yet more than 97% of Swedish children are vaccinated.

Social distancing also reflects Swedish culture much more than many others. The country is very sparsely populated and over half of Swedish homes contain just one person, the highest number of single-person households in the world. This coupled with the lack of social kissing and hugging that is found in Southern Europe has meant Sweden

was already better set up to mitigate risks than most other countries. Sweden's response can't be properly evaluated until the crisis is over, but its unique position over the issue means that if their response was to fail, it would face widespread international scrutiny, and would endanger the strong relationship between Swedish authorities and the people.



America's political system doesn't work

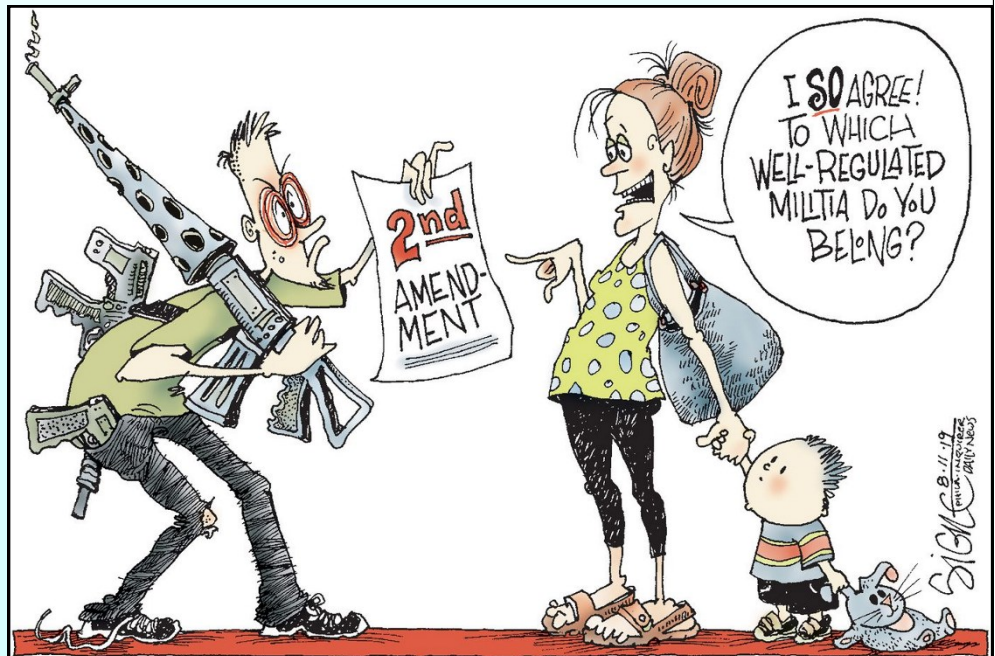
By Freja Webber

Upon studying US politics, I have very quickly realised that the American political system is heavily flawed. It evolves around the idea that power must be delegated to the states in order to protect them from the federal government. This idea also led to the controversial second amendment to the US Constitution which states that 'a well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed'. This has made it almost impossible to pass gun control legislation, despite the continued loss of life in mass shootings with 24 happening this year alone.

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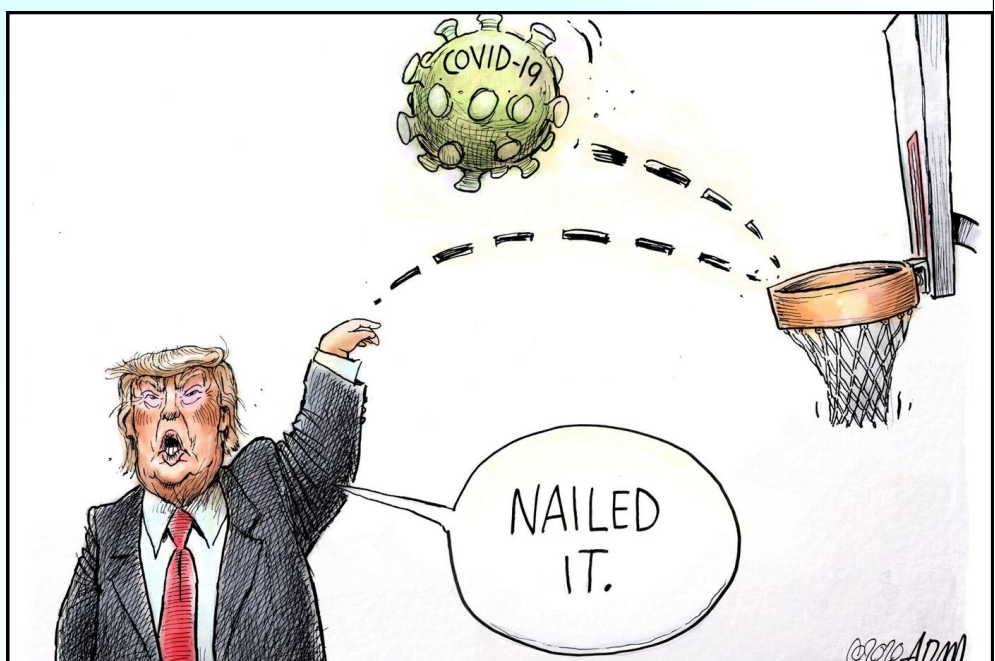
And now during the Pandemic yet another issue has been highlighted. Because the constitution is intent on limiting the power of the federal government it means that the states alone have the right to decide whether to introduce quarantines. This would be the equivalent of Birmingham deciding that it shouldn't enforce quarantine instead of Westminster. America has suffered 79,696 deaths compared to 7,549 deaths in Germany. These deaths are partly because of protestors campaigning that they have the right to work, the right to haircuts and therefore cannot be told to self-isolate.

Ironically, yet still tragically, 60 year old John McDaniel died from



complications related to Covid-19 a few weeks after tweeting 'If you are paranoid about getting sick, just don't go out,' he wrote, adding that others shouldn't be prevented from 'living their lives'. Sadly, many more people will die as they refuse to stay inside, yet they are still being urged on by Trump. Aside from Trump's incompetence and his refusal to act it shows that the government should

have the ability to over-ride the states - to tell the states to control their citizens and keep them inside. If this were the case women's right to an abortion (which some states have restricted) would be protected in all the states and fewer people would be dying.

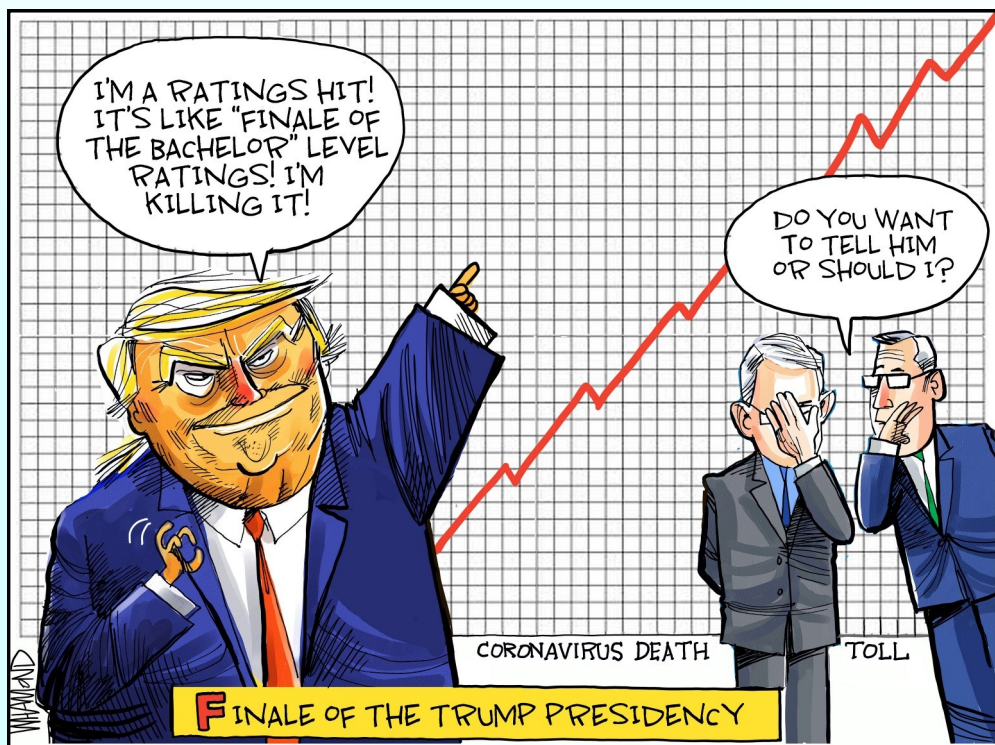


Will Trump's coronavirus failure cost him the election?

By Katie McCabe

In the US, more than 78,000 people have died of coronavirus, with there being 1.2m cases confirmed there. These are the two highest figures across the world for this pandemic. Many states in the US have introduced lockdown measures in March, but some have now lifted restrictions by, for example, allowing people to return to work. However, this has led to health officials warning that this may lead to the virus spreading further.

The approach that current President, Donald Trump, has taken has fluctuated. For example, in February, he dismissed the fact that this virus was a threat to America, stating that it would just disappear. However, by mid-March, he acknowledged how much of a threat it was. In April, he suggested that a possible treatment of coronavirus could be to ingest disinfectant, but, obviously, experts immediately rejected this claim. In early May, Trump announced that he would close down his government's coronavirus task force, but later said it would continue, but to focus purely on reopening the economy.



The approach that Donald Trump has taken has caused him to obtain criticism from ex-Politicians, as well as the general American public. For example, ex-President, Barack Obama, strongly criticised Donald Trump (his successor) over his response to the coronavirus crisis. In a private call, he called the handling of the pandemic in the US 'an

absolute chaotic disaster'. It has been reported that these remarks were made while encouraging former staff to work for Joe Biden's presidential election team. This could be because Obama has chosen to endorse Biden in the 2020 presidential election, and therefore he could be being harsher on Trump to try and persuade people to vote for Biden.



The response that Trump has taken to the coronavirus pandemic could really affect his campaign to become President for a second term at the end of 2020. People may believe that he did not take the best approach and will therefore be more inclined to vote for the Democratic nominee, Joe Biden, if they prefer what his views and ideas about the virus were. Whether this will be the case or not will be shown in November 2020, after the presidential election, which has been hugely affected by this global pandemic.

Déjà vu all over again?

By Jack Arrowsmith

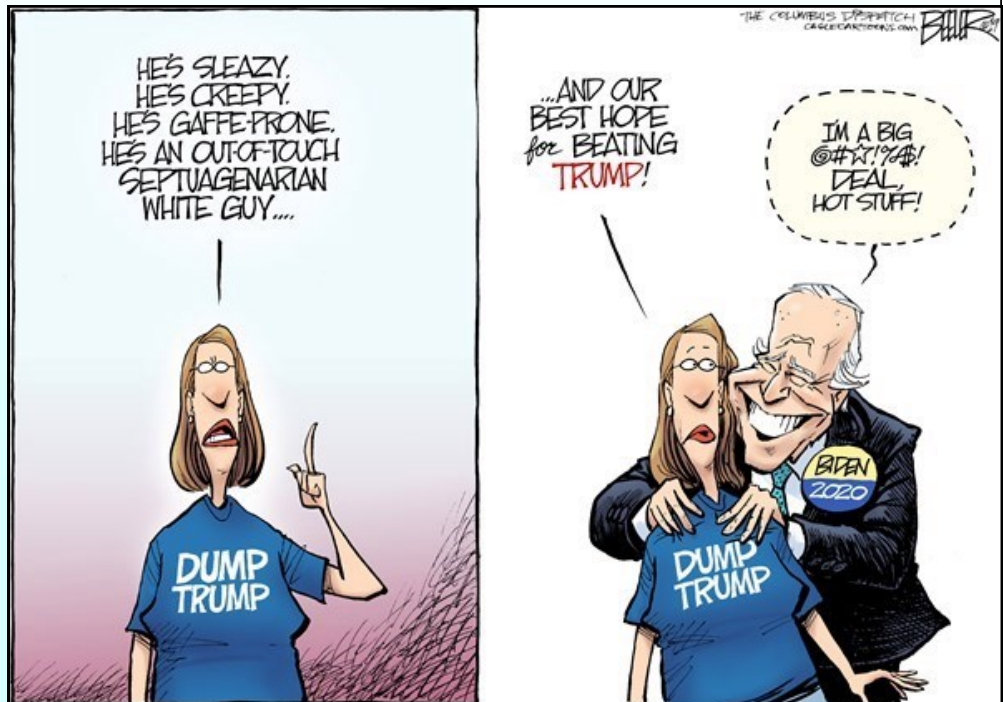
During the Coronavirus pandemic, it is easy to lose sight of the other stories that matter.

In March 2020, Tara Reade came forward to the US media, claiming that in 1993, during her time working for the presumptive Democratic Presidential nominee, Joe Biden had sexually assaulted her. During the 2019 scandal where 8 women came forward claiming that Biden had behaved inappropriately by kissing, touching or hugging them, Reade had claimed that Biden had touched her in ways which made her uncomfortable.

Many have criticised the length of time between the incident and Reade coming forward. But it is vital that we give Reade a fair hearing, and examine her claims closely.

Firstly, it is important that we treat any potential victims of sexual assault with kindness and decency. These crimes are often committed where victims feel helpless, unable to challenge the entrenched power of their harasser. By taking their claims seriously and giving them the respect they deserve, we can work towards an environment where victims feel more comfortable coming forward.

But Reade's claims should also be carefully examined because they do



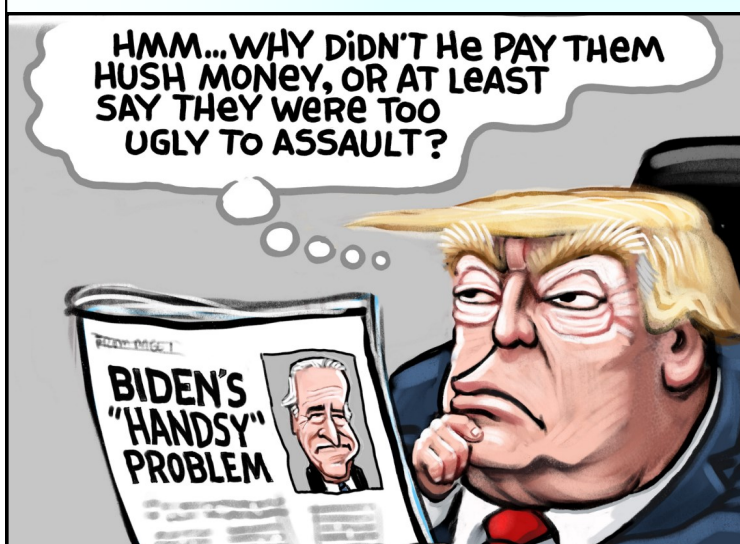
have some corroboration. A 1996 court document shows that Reade had complained to her ex-husband about facing sexual harassment in Biden's office. Her brother, a former neighbour and a former colleague of Reade's have all claimed that they discussed the incident with her at the time.

If the accusations are true, then it means that Joe Biden exploited the power disparity between the two of them to assault her. This would be a brazen abuse of power, a clear sign of Biden exploiting his position for personal gain. The last three years have demonstrated the consequences of a President willing

workplace. This would massively undermine the progress made during the MeToo movement.

It would also entirely undermine Biden's case for the presidency. When the campaign was launched in April 2019, Biden described the election as 'a battle for the soul of this nation.' The strategy is clearly to attack Trump's character, but these attacks will be rendered useless if it transpires that Biden himself is a sexual predator. The campaign will simply become a battle between two misogynists, and there will be no moral difference between the candidates.

We must listen to Tara Reade. It may well be the case that in the end her claims don't stand up to scrutiny, but if Democrats find her claims convincing, they should remove Biden, on the grounds that nominating him would be both morally outrageous, and a strategic blunder. When the risks Trump poses to the US are so profound, Democrats cannot risk making the same mistake of ignoring potential immorality, as Republicans did in 2016.



to enrich his own position; Trump was impeached due to his exploitation of America's power abroad to for personal gain. If Reade is right, then nominating Biden would elevate an individual who has exploited his authority to assault women in the

Will China be a major issue in the US Presidential elections?

By Henry Davies

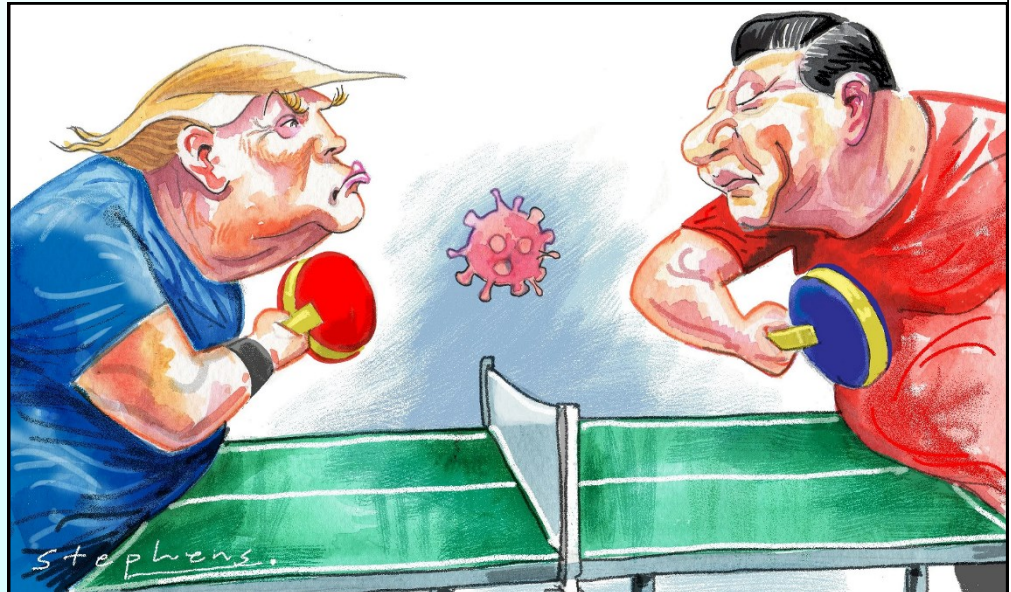
Despite the hostile partisan atmosphere in the US political system, there has been one issue where cooperation has flourished and bipartisan legislation has been passed. This issue is China. The Trump presidency has marked a new era of relations with China by taking a tough and often blunt approach in forming relations with them. Congress has followed similarly with bills confronting China on the recent Hong Kong demonstrations and sanctioning individuals involved in the widespread detainment of Uighur Muslims.

'The Trump presidency has marked a new era of relations with China by taking a tough and often blunt approach'

However, recently it has been reported that Trump wants to make China a central issue in the election campaign in order to highlight his new approach to Sino-American relations. This approach he perceives better protects American interests whilst simultaneously pointing out the weak record that the Democrats and especially Biden have on China.

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This strategy gained momentum and legitimacy when the Biden team released adverts suggesting that



Trump had himself been weak on China when he applauded Xi Jinping's response to the crisis and believed the Chinese reports that the virus was under control. This suggests that the Democrats are trying to reverse the effect of Trump's strategy in an attempt to make it backfire for him.

However, as the lockdowns across America begin to end and the

economic and social damage is fully realised, US politicians will be more than happy to point the blame at China. The significance of this issue in the 2020 election is yet to be seen, but with the rivalry and competition for global influence between China and the US set to intensify in the future, the significance of this issue will certainly rise substantially in future US elections



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During lockdown students and staff at Solihull have been making the best of things. Here are a few highlights ... send in your pictures for the Share Happy page on the VLE!



VE Day picnic



NHS Staffrocks



Swimming practice in the paddling pool!



First loaf of bread ... someone get the headmaster a new apron!



Volunteering at St Giles Hospice



Sailing in the back garden!