

## **View from Westminster...**

The world, to use the language of grandparents everywhere, is in a bit of a pickle. Coronavirus continues its inexorable stampede across the globe, with Latin America taking its unwanted turn in the epicentre spotlight at the time of writing. The Chinese have responded to widespread worldwide condemnation by whipping out their tugboats and parking them off the coast of Taiwan, whilst additionally undermining all known political agreements regarding human rights violations in Hong Kong. President Trump meanwhile is threatening to unleash his own military on the good citizens of Minnesota for having the temerity to be upset at yet another black man being killed by law enforcement officers. As social media trigger warns his increasingly incoherent diatribes, one can almost see his face going a deeper shade of tango. The race for the White House will be one where the finishing line is somewhere south of the gutter.

And here in Blighty.... should a political adviser resign for using a car as opposed to an optician to test his eyesight?

Mr Cummings, ever the radical, cut a rather lonely and despondent figure for his Rose Garden moment; sitting behind a picnic table looking like he'd been roped into attending the school fete to sell the raffle tickets. However, at its heart, this is a massive story because it is all about trust. As the nation emerges blinking from its back garden and prepares to risk wandering down a high street, we need public adherence to changing and necessarily more ambiguous regulations to be watertight. I'm not yet persuaded how that public health message is reaffirmed when those helping to make the rules are perceived, rightly or wrongly, to have broken them.

"Move on" shouts the government. Nothing to see here. But the damage is already done, perhaps even beyond the immediate public health crisis. The Teflon cloak Boris has worn throughout his glittering career is probably shredded. At a time when a steady hand is required, there are some questioning whether what we need are detail and sobriety as opposed to an act that causes one to reach for the golden buzzer.

Before this, the Government would have wanted to point to the polls, which used to show a commanding lead for them. While this might still be true inside Treasury, where Rishi enjoys the kind of popularity hitherto reserved for his boss next door, so far, he has been the Chancellor who likes to say yes. Furlough payments – absolutely! Self Employed? Have some cash! There are none more socialist in policy formulation right now than Conservatives inside HMT. But now MPs inboxes tell a different story. All this will hold...right until the moment the debt collectors turn up threatening to remove jobs, houses and triple A credit ratings. At that point both Rishi and his boss will see just how deep the wide polling lead is. For Starmer, silence might be golden right now. 2024 is a long way away and there will be plenty of time to discuss how we rebuild following this dreadful pandemic.