

Letters to the Editor



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Gambling review

Sir, As a group of 30 people harmed by online gambling, we welcome the government's review designed to bring the laws into the digital age. But we were dismayed to hear the industry's representatives scaremonger about the threat of the "black market" if the government were to do the right thing by imposing sensible regulation of stakes and affordability controls. The subtext is that black market sites do not afford the consumer protection of regulated sites. Collectively, we lost £11,859,749.38 with 507 regulated gambling site accounts, compared with £113,000 to black market sites. If the government wants to prevent harm, it should be finding ways to raise standards, not facilitate a race to the bottom. Action can be taken by the Gambling Commission to tackle unregulated operators, through their payment processors and via domain blocking. The regulator should also revoke the licence of any content supplier that is providing platforms to unlicensed sites and make blocking software available for those who want to stop gambling on regulated sites via Gamstop, the gambling self-exclusion scheme. The threat of the black market has been overstated by the gambling industry. It should not be allowed to use this as an excuse to hold down standards.

David Aitchison; Christine Boyce; Daniel Chandler; Nick Craze;

Prioritising who gets the coronavirus vaccine

Sir, Dame Cressida Dick makes a powerful and persuasive case for London's police officers to be recognised in the prioritisation process for coronavirus vaccinations ("Police need the job", Jan 12). Most of her arguments apply just as strongly to London's prison officers. In HMP Pentonville, where I serve as a chaplain, 77 officers out of 450 are off work in isolation, of whom a third have tested positive, several are poorly and two seriously ill in hospital. Despite these problems, staff and prisoner morale remains steady. This is greatly to the credit of our governor, Ian Blakeman, and his team. Yet the pressures of the pandemic are rising. The number of prisoners on remand, 51 of whom have tested positive, has doubled. Their waiting times for court hearings have soared to an unprecedented 12 to 18 months or even longer. In this fragile situation the government could send an important signal of support and encouragement if it granted prison officers (along with NHS workers, police officers, ambulance teams and other deserving categories) some measure of priority in the vaccination process.

The Rev Jonathan Aitken
London SW5

Value the Falklands

Sir, Roger Boyes's article ("Does Britain still care about the Falklands?", Jan 6) is harmful to the Falkland Islands and could encourage Argentina's hostility and sovereignty claim. It suggests that EU countries could withdraw support for the Falklands in their wish for closer links

Sir, It may be that GPs are already quietly seeing to this problem, but the absence of unpaid carers from the priority lists for vaccinations is an oversight needing correction. In her November 2020 report, Helen Walker, the chief executive of Carers UK, quoted an estimated number of 11.5 million unpaid carers in Britain, saving the public purse £530 million every day. If only a small percentage of these good people succumb to Covid-19, the demand to replace their essential services will cause our already fragile social care infrastructure to collapse.

Philip Bambury
Langton Long, Dorset

Sir, I am 90 and a half years old and have still not received my vaccine. I am registered at a NHS practice in St John's Wood, northwest London. Some of my contemporaries, younger than me, have already had their second jab. What is going on?

Lady Cortazzi
London NW8

Sir, Those who have been vaccinated must not become complacent, for how can we yet know that they and those around them are protected? From

young to elderly, vaccinated to unvaccinated, everyone's attention and social behaviour must remain focused if we are to see the health, social and economic risks diminish.

Sarah Richards
Poole, Dorset

Sir, Yesterday I received a perfectly addressed Christmas card from local friends, clearly postmarked December 21. I hope that the summons for vaccinations are being posted in very good time, otherwise we oldies will be blamed for a lack of enthusiasm or non-attendance, when nothing could be further from the truth.

Rosemary Attenborough
Sevenoaks, Kent

Sir, In order to reach those who cannot travel ("Roving teams and hundreds of centres for biggest job rollout", Jan 12) could I suggest the use of the nation's fleet of ice-cream vans? They are not busy at this time of year; have the refrigeration facilities; can announce their arrival with a loud blast of *Greensleeves*; and the skill needed to deliver the jab is not unlike slipping a chocolate flake into a cone.

David Timson
Inkberrow, Worcs

Broken system

Sir, Priti Patel's review into police and crime commissioners (PCC) might set out to make the commissioners more accountable but one proposal looks set to do the opposite ("Priti Patel wants police to explain unpopular decisions", Jan 11). Changing the system to elect PCCs to Westminster's broken first

Sir, I was joking

Sir, Your piece "Rough times for Parky" (News, Jan 11) claimed that I was "upset" because members of my golf club don't call me Sir Michael. Not true. In an interview with *Reader's Digest*, I recalled a time when a visitor to Wentworth, a stranger, called me Mr Parkinson or Parky throughout our conversation, while always referring to my wife as Lady Mary. After a while I asked him how he imagined my wife became Lady Mary without me being Sir Michael. *Reader's Digest* observed that as I spoke I "chuckled". Omitting that detail turns my wry observation into an indication that I have upset fellow members of the club, that I no longer play golf at Wentworth and that I complained that I was not being properly respected. In fact I have not played golf for many years because of chronic back pain. Both Mary and I are happy at Wentworth and in particular admire the unfailing courtesy and kindness shown by the entire staff.

Michael Parkinson
Maidenhead, Berks

Women write too

Sir, Michael Henderson ("Reading books is not meant to be a competitive sport", Jan 11) is clearly proud of his literary tastes and reading habits. But every single one of the 13 authors he cites, whether of fiction or non-fiction, is male. I wonder if someone could tell him that women write books too.

Mary Ann Sieghart
London W14

Sir, I agree with Michael Henderson that reading is not a race, but may I suggest that he sets a goal for the

A true all-rounder