



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Times letters: ten-year jail sentence for lying about travel

Write to [letters@thetimes.co.uk](mailto:letters@thetimes.co.uk)

Thursday February 11 2021, 12.01am, The Times

Share



Save



**S**ir, A ten-year prison sentence for those who conceal their arrival from a high-risk country is way off the scale of criminal punishments (“[Tourists may face 10 years in jail](#) for lies about travel”, Feb 10). On my chaplain’s rounds at HMP Pentonville today I spoke to a child rapist (serving a seven-year sentence); a violent armed robber (five years); and a largescale street drug dealer (three years).

The nearest crime to concealment of travel arrangements would be perjury. No sentence for perjury in recent years has exceeded four years. Deterrent sentences, even in a pandemic, should surely bear some relation to the accepted standards of criminal justice.

**The Rev Jonathan Aitken**

London SW5

Sir, If a law is not clear and accessible before coming into force, it may well be unlawful. Apart from a prison sentence being grossly disproportionate to missing Mauritius off a form, how are the courts to manage a further influx of prosecutions? Crown court trials are already being fixed for 2023. We are in a public health crisis and not in the middle of a violent uprising. Slow governmental policy decisions should not be counterbalanced by the quick introduction of criminal punishment. This latest proposal, for a ten-year prison sentence, underlines why criminal law needs to be made through parliament, with all its checks and balances and amendments, and not left to the whim of ministers seeking to lay blame on the public for its own policy failings.

**Kirsty Brimelow, QC**

Doughty Street Chambers, London

involving bold assertions as to what an appropriate offence and sentence should be, without careful analysis of existing legislation and sentencing guidelines, may create headlines and short-term deterrence but, longer term, will confuse the police and public and undermine faith in the criminal justice system.

Criminal justice policy cannot be reduced to a series of knee-jerk political reactions that leave the police, Crown Prosecution Service, criminal lawyers and judges to pick up the pieces. It is in any case likely that Covid-related travel dodgers and dupers can be prosecuted under existing legislation.

**James Mulholland, QC**

Chairman, the Criminal Bar Association

Sir, It's expensive to keep someone in prison for ten years. The punishment should fit the crime: we should take away their passports.

**Hugh Johnson**

London W8

Sir, As a Briton living in Canada, where a three-day stay in a quarantine hotel costs C\$2,000 (£1,138), I applaud the British government on negotiating the relative bargain of £1,750 for 11 nights.

**Murray Sutherland**

Montreal

Sir, Concerning your editorial ("[Long Haul](#)", Feb 10), there is no need to try to provide a hotel room for every person who wishes to return. We should provide a certain number and when these are filled travellers should be required to wait where they are abroad until a room becomes available.

**Manon Owen**


Witney, Oxon

### **SECRETIVE STATE**

Sir, At a time of increasing misinformation, fake news and political spin it has never been more important for the government to communicate transparently. Appallingly, as reported by *The Times* (Feb 9 & [10](#)) and uncovered by the political website Open Democracy, our government has decided that freedom of information (FoI) is no longer a given in the UK, with standard FOI requests either denied or delayed as a matter of course.

SPONSORED



  
Covid-19 has  
needing to fin

The government claims to be an advocate of media freedom yet in the past two months a clearing house for FOI requests restricting access to government-held data has been unearthed; a freelance photojournalist has been arrested for documenting a protest in Kent; and a government minister has provoked a Twitter storm on a journalist for daring to ask questions about her role in promoting vaccinations.

These actions undermine our moral authority on the global stage to challenge repressive regimes that deny media freedom. We deserve better: the government needs to get its house in order.

**Ruth Smeeth**

Chief executive, Index on Censorship

### **CHESTFEEDING**

Sir, Further to your report “ ‘[Chestfeeding](#)’ advice from trans-friendly midwives” (Feb 10), if Brighton and Sussex University NHS Trust needs a formal “gender inclusive language policy” to instruct staff to treat all patients with dignity and respect, then it has a bigger problem than “transphobia”. It is not “biological essentialism” to say that mothers give birth to children, and then breastfeed them with mother’s milk. It is essential biology.

Such attempts to control language may backfire spectacularly on transgender people like me as the public tires of being told what they are expected to think. If even the facts of life are deemed to be transphobic, then perhaps transphobia has lost all meaning.

**Debbie Hayton**

Birmingham

Sir, While Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust may be applauded for its gender-inclusive language policy in maternity services, the term “chestfeeding” goes against biology. Both men and women have mammary glands and indeed men can and do get breast cancer. We should stick with “breastfeeding”: “chestfeeding” is meaningless.

**Rosemary Hannon**

Sheffield

### **FIGHTING THE FLAB**

Sir, Alice Thomson’s article should be required reading for all public health officials (“After battling Covid we need to [fight the flab](#)”, Feb 10). Although symptoms of metabolic illness can be treated, tackling the root causes are fundamentally an individual responsibility. This responsibility is tempting to ignore in normal times when longevity is largely unaffected. If