

OPINION



MARK FLETCHER

Bolsover MP

Contributions from home are not good for our democracy

In somewhat unfortunate timing, just as we reach a period of prolonged sunshine, I find myself on my first bill committee in Westminster.

Bill committees are formed after a bill has its second reading in the Chamber and go through the legislation in an incredibly detailed way.

A total of 17 of us have sat, socially distanced, in a shaded committee room in Parliament, debating the various clauses and purposes of the bill line by line. Unlike the House of Commons Chamber, MPs are still required to attend in person to contribute.



The debates have been interesting, informative and good-natured. It has felt almost normal.

As you may have seen, in recent months the House of Commons

has been operating on a hybrid basis, with MPs being able to contribute from home. Although given the circumstances, this has not been good for our democracy.

In recent months, the House of Commons has been operating on a hybrid basis, with MPs being able to contribute from home, says Mark Fletcher.

These contributions have largely been pre-prepared speeches, delivered without the interventions you would usually get in the Chamber. Ridiculous statements and 'facts' have gone unchallenged; it's encouraged tribalism and social media clips rather than scrutiny and thoughtfulness.

The bill committee, which is about a new science and research funding project called ARIA, has been a reminder that Parliamentarians can shine and add real value when proper debate happens. We cannot return to normality in the Chamber soon enough, so that the laws and decisions we make are properly debated.

But the topic of the bill is also a helpful reminder of what we need to do as a country following the pandemic. As we've seen with the vaccines roll out, a country needs many things to be successful. A strong science base, strong collaboration between the public and the private sector, a government that is willing to act quickly and is willing to finance projects that may not work.

Throw into that a proper manufacturing base (so that we aren't reliant on exports for critical supplies), a skilled workforce and a need for different arms of the government to work with, and learn from each other and we begin to see the foundations of what we need to do next.

The past 14 months have been unbelievably challenging for many nations including Britain, but they have also shown us the pathway to what being a successful and sustainable modern economy looks like in the 21st century, particularly now that we've left the EU.

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