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The View from Westminster: Chris Grayling MP on Military aid to Ukraine, Energy levy and the Queen

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The situation in Ukraine remains appalling and the brutality that has been wreaked on its people defies understanding. I think that most of us thought that this kind of war was a part of European history and that a military strategy that involved blasting cities to pieces one shell at a time was a part of the past. It will take decades to rebuild the damage.

I am glad that the UK has been at the forefront of helping the Ukrainian people. We were the main country to provide them with military equipment and training after the Russians seized Crimea and have supported them through the build-up to the War and as they try to resist the invasion. It is vital that this support should continue.

The conduct of the Russian leadership has been a brutal reminder of the real consequences of aggressive dictatorship, and of tight state-run media propaganda machines. For all of the frustrations that people may level at our democracy from time to time, the alternative is much much worse. No system of Government will ever be perfect, but the Ukraine War has been a timely reminder to the democratic world of just how important our values and our systems are, where Governments can be removed at the ballot box and where their decisions are subject to real scrutiny and open debate.

I want also to thank our fantastic team of volunteers locally who have been raising funds, sending goods and providing support to the refugees arriving here. Also to the families that have taken them in. I know that the system has been much too slow, though there are genuine safeguarding issues that have needed to be taken into account. But there is some great work being done in Epsom for the refugees and I am very grateful to all of those involved.

The cost of living issue remains a huge challenge for many people locally. The surge in energy costs particularly is unprecedented in recent years. The last time that there was anything like this was in the oil crisis of 1974.

I hope that the measures announced by the Chancellor last week will help those worst affected. The independent Institute for Fiscal Studies said after the announcement that it should insulate the poorest families from the impact of this year’s increases.

But I can’t pretend that things will be easy still, with a combination of the continuing impact of the pandemic in Asia, and the impact of the war in Ukraine having major consequences around the world. As big as the worries here though are the potential implications for people in the developing world. Ukraine has been a big supplier of food to many African countries, and with rising prices and short supplies, the risks are that there will be real shortages there too.

My view is that we will need to step up food production in this country wherever we sensibly can, and provide the right support to farmers to invest in that extra capacity. And we will need to be ready to target our aid budgets on those areas in the developing world that risk being worst affected.

I was hugely privileged in my time in Government to serve as both Lord Chancellor and Lord President of the Council, chairing the Queen’s Privy Council. In both those roles, I had regular contact with and meetings with the Queen.

This weekend’s Platinum Jubilee is an extraordinary national event, celebrating one of the most distinguished reigns this country has ever seen. She is someone that we should all be extremely proud of, and grateful to.

But I have also been fortunate enough to see her first-hand as a person. So I know her not just to be a great figurehead for this country, but as an incredibly smart, decent and likeable person. No one else could possibly have done the job that she has done, and done so with determination, kindness and a smile. She is quite simply extraordinary.

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