



22 April 2022

Dear Constituent,

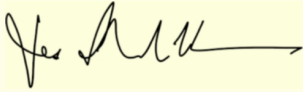
Over the past few days, I have been asked to take a further position on 'Partygate' following news that both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have received a fixed penalty notice for violating Covid protocols. Given that politics is never straightforward and that no decision is binary, this has not been an easy issue for any Conservative politician and I am not alone in wanting a definitive outcome from which we can all move on. I am also clear that the revelation has now been politicised to such an extent that it is detracting from Government business and stoking unnecessary division across the UK.

There is no question that the Prime Minister has accepted his fine in good faith and paid it immediately. He was deemed to be at fault, has taken responsibility for his actions and apologised profusely. Having personally engaged with him twice this week, it is also evident that he is genuinely contrite and remorseful. So I do not believe that he wilfully misled the House at any stage for he believed that meeting a few work colleagues on his birthday, in his place of work and in order to thank them for their hard work, was entirely within the spirit of the rules. But I do empathise strongly with the anger that constituents are feeling in that the regulations were broken whilst most of us were obeying them and at a time of misery, sadness and loss for so many. Indeed, my own family and I followed the rules so it does stick in the throat, even though the pressure under which the staff at No.10 were operating was exceptional. And my angst stems not just from the double-standards and personal failures that are now apparent but also because of the huge political capital that is still being expended on 'Partygate', when there are so many wider imperatives to deal with.

So what happens now? Having been given a free vote by the Whips on the Privilege Motion today, I was content to join many of my colleagues in Government by concurring with the Opposition that 'the matter be referred to the Committee of Privileges to consider whether the Right Honourable Member's conduct amounted to a contempt of the House'. I would therefore have voted AYE had it been forced to a division. So given that the Prime Minister has made a full apology and allowed MPs to make their own finding on whether he should be referred, there is no question that the process of investigation should continue as that is what Parliament has formally agreed. I do not therefore believe it is right to take a definitive position now or comment further until all the facts are known and we must allow Sue Gray, the Police and the Committee of Privileges to finalise their respective reports.

For the record, Boris Johnson remains the elected leader of the Conservative Party, has been the Prime Minister throughout my time in Parliament and continues to deliver an ambitious manifesto following his landslide victory at the 2019 General Election. As a Conservative MP, I am clear that he continues to be the right man for

the job, notwithstanding the backdrop of unprecedented challenges under which he has led the country and the errors of judgement that have occurred at No.10. And in the event that I do ultimately write to the 1922 Committee once all of the facts have emerged and the Committee of Privileges has made its finding, I regret that this will remain a private matter that reflects my own discretion, integrity and party loyalty, as you would rightly expect from your MP.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Sunderland', is written on a light yellow rectangular background.

James Sunderland MP
Member of Parliament for the Bracknell Constituency
Bracknell, Crowthorne, Finchampstead, Sandhurst and Wokingham Without