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MP for Chelmsford



Very unfair that executors of estate can be held liable if a will is invalid

I've said this before but it's worth repeating because it's true: when you're elected as an MP, nobody gives you a special pill – let's call it the 'Pill of Power' – that unlocks the world's secrets, gives you wisdom beyond your years, or allows you to know the answer to everything instantly.

Occasionally, I think that's easy to forget.

Several times since the election, I've been asked my opinion on something about which I have to confess I know absolutely nothing. Sometimes, my confession is followed by a look of disappointment or confusion from the person asking the question.

There may be many reasons for this. Perhaps it's a topic they've been following closely in the news or in their social media feeds and have assumed that my super special Pill of Power means that I have also read everything there is to read on the topic.

For some, it's perhaps a long-standing passion – a change they want to see in the world about which they know everything and assume others will want to as well.

Sometimes it's a very current issue – perhaps some piece of legislation that is going through Parliament right now of which my interlocutor has been following every twist and turn, every amendment and motion, and assumes I have been too.

I think it's a very normal human trait to assume that others have the same knowledge and experience that we do.

Humans have an extremely strong tendency to view the world through their own experiences.

And while some are better at it than others, we often find it very difficult to imagine a life lived differently to our own, to have a different frame of reference.

I don't at all mind being asked these questions, but I hope people will understand why I often have to confess to not knowing much – if anything – about their chosen subject.

I think it's very important that everyone is able to say "I don't know" when asked a question.

The Pill of Power doesn't exist, so

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President Donald Trump
CHIP SOMODEVILLA

we should expect our politicians not to know the answers to some questions.

I would go one step further and say that we should perhaps be wary of anyone, and especially politicians, who always profess to have an answer, or detailed knowledge of a subject.

Logically, nobody can know everything and we shouldn't be disappointed when they truthfully tell us they don't.

Why do I say all of this? Well, partly because of what we're seeing on the world stage.

Across the Atlantic, there's a President of the United States of America who seems to have surrounded himself with people who agree with him – or at least people who are willing to say they agree with him.

I think that's dangerous for a whole host of reasons, but mainly because I don't think this is a president whose huge yet fragile ego will allow him to admit he doesn't know the answer to something.

I also don't think there are people

around him any longer who are brave enough to tell him when he's wrong.

Just look at the way he treated Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office a couple of weeks ago when President Zelenskyy dared to suggest there was an alternative viewpoint: castigation, humiliation, bully tactics on a world stage, the likes of which we have never seen before.

Make no mistake: President Trump is dangerous. From what I can see, he appears incapable of even considering he might be wrong about something, or that somebody else might have a legitimately different point of view.

What's more, I don't think he's capable of even admitting to himself that this is true, and therefore he sees no need to seek opinions other than those which support his own. This is known as 'confirmation bias', or only seeking information to back up your own preconceived views.

It's dangerous at the best of times – but hard to overstate its implications for a world leader.

Things are moving so quickly that by the time you read this, yet another diplomatic crisis may be unfolding, but we need to remember that this

isn't just about diplomacy – this is about saving lives and protecting our own country's security as well as that of our genuine friends and allies.

I know I usually devote this column to much more cheerful and local issues more obviously directly affecting Chelmsford, but I hope you'll forgive me for mentioning world affairs this week.

Ultimately, this does affect all of us, including right here in Chelmsford, and I wanted to let you know that while I spend most of my time and effort trying to help Chelmsford constituents and working on local and national issues, I can't – and don't – ignore what is rapidly becoming one of the most worrying international backdrops we have seen in our lifetimes.

On that note, and in the spirit of issues that I knew nothing about before they were raised with me, I thought I'd briefly mention an issue that has come up in casework recently: intestacy.

Intestacy refers to the situation where a person dies without leaving a valid will.

When this happens, their estate (money, property, and possessions) is distributed according to the laws of intestacy, which vary depending

on the jurisdiction.

Typically, these laws prioritise close family members such as spouses, children, and parents. If no eligible relatives are found, the estate may pass to the state.

So far, so unsurprising. But what I didn't know was that if a will is found to be invalid, the executors of the estate can be left liable for all the legal fees, not just up until that point, but also going forward until a resolution is hopefully found and (again, hopefully) the fees are paid out of the estate.

This is a situation that a Chelmsford constituent has found themselves in with legal fees now stretching into thousands of pounds.

This is one of the more unusual bits of casework that my team and I have received over the past few months.

I don't know the answer to this – and there may be nothing I can do to help this particular constituent, but it does seem a very unfair position for them to have been placed in when they had thought they were doing a good deed for the deceased person. Something to watch out for.

I hope you're well and have been enjoying the recent sunshine and warmer temperatures.

Marie

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