

Tax is not essential: public services are. It's time ...

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I have to admit that last night's Sky Television debate with Keir Starmer and Rishi Sunak was, overall, disappointing and uninspiring.

Beth Rigby did her best to bring to life two boring candidates to be Prime Minister, but at the end of the day, she had to work with the material that she got. When the most interesting thing that Rishi Sunak could say about himself to increase his appeal to voters was that he ate a lot of Twix, the scale of her task was apparent.

That said, she fell into the trap into which so many journalists appear to be falling at this election. She pushed the question of tax time after time, after time. That was a mistake. What was clear from the audience reaction was that what people wanted to talk about were public services, their quality, and the quantity of their supply.

Like, it seems all journalists, Beth Rigby has not realised that taxes are not an essential part of life. They are only the corollary of the supply of public services.

They are not even a precondition of the supply of those services because government always pays for everything it sorbs upon with money newly created on its behalf by the Bank of England.

The quantum tax required from the economy is, then, always the balancing figure within the fiscal equation, seeking to find the appropriate compromise between controlling inflation and providing economic stimulus.

All this nuance was lost when focusing upon tax alone, without ever discussing why that tax might not be at an appropriate level given the demand for public services in the country.

I can only hope that during the remainder of this election campaign there might be an improvement in the quality of debate on this issue. It is clear that both our leading political parties are talking nonsense about tax, with neither presenting any honesty about what levels of tax might be required given their wholly unrealistic appraisals of the scale of costs that they will have to incur to supply the services that the country will

undoubtedly need.

As a result I just hope that debate might now be focused on issues like the health service, social care, education, environmental change and other critical matters. What level of tax is then required to balance the required level of spending becomes an appropriate issue for debate. Putting tax first is, however, wrong. That is not what happens within the economic operations of government. That is not what happens within the actual priorities of any sensible government. And that is not what the public are most interested in.

it is time that journalists, and politicians, got this right.