

EUROPE

Boris Johnson's backing for aid risks his lockdown credibility

Some British Conservatives are calling for Dominic Cummings to resign over apparent breaches of lockdown rules.



Prime Minister Boris Johnson. | Pippa Fowley/10 Downing Street via AP

By **CRISTINA GALLARDO**

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LONDON — Boris Johnson has a choice: to keep his chief adviser or to maintain the credibility of the U.K. government's lockdown rules.

That's the message from a growing number of Tory MPs who are feeling the backlash from their constituents over the alleged multiple breaches of coronavirus lockdown rules by Dominic Cummings, the strategic guru who masterminded the Brexit campaign and Johnson's path to a thumping election victory.

Two days after the Guardian and Mirror reported that Cummings had driven 250 miles from London to stay at a property next to his parents' house in Durham while his wife had coronavirus symptoms, the story was still dominating front pages and the morning political shows on Sunday. These included new claims that Cummings had been spotted 30 miles from his parents' house on Easter day and in Durham on April 19, allegedly on a separate trip up from London.

Tory backbenchers are highly attuned to constituent anger over any suggestion that there is one rule for those in power and another for everyone else.

"Cummings must go before he does any more harm," prominent Brexiteer MP Steve Baker told Sky News' Sophy Ridge on Sunday. "If he doesn't resign, we'll just keep burning through Boris' political capital at a rate we can ill afford in the midst of this crisis."

Downing Street and senior ministers have rallied to Cummings' defense and the adviser himself insists that he acted "reasonably and legally" because he was acting in the interests of his four-year-old son. But former Tory [Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes](#) [tweeted](#) there could not be "wriggle room" for some people when it comes to lockdown restrictions, and that she had made her views clear to her whip.

"My inbox is rammed with very angry constituents and I do not blame them. They have made difficult sacrifices over the course of the last 9 weeks," she wrote.

Other Conservative MPs have publicly joined Baker's call, including Simon Hoare, Roger Gale, Craig Whittaker, Peter Bone and Damian Collins, with the latter saying Cummings has a "track record of believing that the rules don't apply to him and treating the scrutiny that should come to anyone in a position of authority with contempt."

According to a [YouGov snap poll](#), 68 percent of respondents said they thought Cummings had broken the lockdown rules, compared to 18 percent who said he had not. Fifty-two percent said they thought he should resign. Meanwhile, an [online petition](#) calling for Cummings to be sacked had collected more than 50,000 signatures on Sunday.

This is bad news for Johnson, who is due to face the House of Commons' liaison committee made up of senior MPs on Wednesday and will certainly be quizzed on why he has stuck by his adviser despite the apparent breaches of the rules.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps toured the TV studios Sunday to deny the latest allegations from the Observer and Sunday Mirror newspapers, telling the BBC's Andrew Marr that Cummings would not resign.

"You're right, everyone's been making huge sacrifices ... the key thing is not to keep moving around but we've never told people specifically where they have to locate themselves," he said, adding that "Mr. Cummings decided that the best way to provide that security was to be in a location where the sister and the niece could drop food off on the doorstep."

He also said Cummings had not returned to Durham afterward for a second time. "When he came back to London, which was on 14th April, he has remained in London since and hasn't been back to Durham, so there are lots of things being said here which are completely untrue," he told Sky's Ridge.

But he conceded he did not know whether Cummings had stopped during his 250-mile journey up to Durham — potentially infecting other people en route. And asked about the alleged witness sighting of Cummings in Barnard Castle

on Easter Day, 30 miles from Durham, Shapps told Marr, “I don’t know about whether those reports are true or false.”

Shapps conceded that Cummings’ father had spoken to police — contrary to what the transport secretary had said at a press conference on Saturday. But he said it was the police who had been contacted by Cummings’ father, not the other way round.

Labour’s Shadow Home Secretary Nick Thomas-Symonds said there should be an urgent investigation by the Cabinet Office and Johnson should take Sunday’s daily government press conference to provide answers. Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party wrote last night to Cabinet Secretary Mark Sedwill, [calling for an urgent inquiry](#).

Thomas-Symonds told Marr show that “the allegations we’ve seen are extraordinarily serious and they do need to be dealt with.” He urged Johnson to chair the daily press conference Sunday to answer questions directly.

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