

Parliament Week of Activities

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

Worthing Herald and Littlehampton Gazette Article

5th November 2020

This week, schools and other groups focus on activities linked to Parliament, building interest amongst students and children who can engage with an MP and with politics.

The words IT STARTS WITH ACTION are in #YourStory OurHistory. Rosettes declare Vote Now, Speak Up, Take Action and Join In. I invite students to consider why our secret ballot box system and observed fair counting matters more than youths with weapons acting as street militias on behalf of a dictator.

Our methods of democracy are not perfect but no national government here thinks it is immune from the electorate's verdict. We remember with pride and amusement the moving pictures of the former Chancellor Kenneth Clarke and his self-drive van leaving Downing street after the Tony Blair landslide victory in 1997.

The first week of November is the focus for activities by older audiences too. Suggestions include Hold A Panel Discussion, Organise A Campaign, Create A Display and Start An E-Petition. My personal movement had a number of starts. Age 12, I was the stamp sticker for the 1956/7 campaign to save the Third Programme, now BBC Radio 3.

At university I joined extensive fund-raising for the Earl Haig Fund, now popularly known as the Poppy Appeal. In recent years I have been the parliamentary representative at the opening of the Field of Remembrance between St Margaret's church and Westminster Abbey.

During our early family life in London, I asked scallywags who broke into our house whether they would kindly go to play football and leave us alone. They asked where? My response was to form and to mobilise a local neighbourhood council, gather some equipment and then to create two football pitches on waste ground. It did not end the offending completely.

My full-time work before election as a member of parliament was with a small electrical contractor putting neon lights outside West End theatres and cinemas. My office in the Covent Garden alley was also the campaign headquarters of the Family Allowance Movement. Poverty groups and I became responsible: we completed the campaign for child benefits by the independent MP Eleanor Rathbone. Her family motto was that what needed to be done can be done. That happens when people come together to make it happen. Marcus Rashford is a modern successor.

Jeremy Corbyn is at least temporarily independent. He and I were granted time for the Rohingya refugees and the impact of Covid-19, especially on the females. If readers feel strong, see or read the 9.30 am Tuesday debate on Westminster Hall, the Commons auxiliary debating chamber.

In the debate I referred to the attack in Vienna. As chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Anglo Austria group I had sent our sympathy to Michael Zimmerman, the Austrian ambassador, adding that no one should blame a group for the action of one or of a few, not there nor Nice and nor here.

Have we learnt from the Holocaust? Not enough and in too few countries. I support the idea of a National Holocaust Memorial and associated education and learning centre. David Cameron this week gave his views to the Inquiry considering the unsuitability of the present design and the location in Victoria Tower Gardens by the House of Lords. I had been the first to give evidence. The former Prime Minister did not try to respond to the issues I raised.

On Wednesday I hope to have spoken on C-19 restrictions and the issues where I believe government should think again, including on churches, safer sport and public houses.