

Security, Prosperity and Respect

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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Sir Kier Starmer, Labour leader, has identified the themes of security, prosperity and respect in the approach he prefers. I welcome this because it makes sense for major parties to share agreement on desired outcomes.

As parliament returns, there will be disagreements. That is the nature of debate: find the awkward things because it might be boring for anyone to listen to a stream of MPs echoing previous speakers.

Between New Year and the restart of the Commons, I called on the former MP Jim Fitzpatrick and his wife Sheila, retired public health doctor. Jim and I were the parliamentary warriors for abused and vulnerable residential leaseholders, before the consequences of the Grenfell tragedy hit so many more. Jim leads Fire Aid, cooperating with Roy Barraclough, our local fire officer. We each cooperated with the work of Sir David Amess on fire safety and I do still.

The Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey was involved before me on the campaign against exploitation of elderly leaseholders in retirement blocks. Respect for the interests of our constituents. The scandalous rip-offs threatened their housing security and emptied their purses and pockets.

The words 'respect', 'security' and 'respect' are relevant in many fields, including the vaccination campaign. Sheila volunteered to be a jabber. Remember she has recently been an experienced doctor. She had to take a 17 stage training programme, before being invited to a hospital to practice putting a needle in a shoulder. She persisted; she has given over 2,500 vaccinations so far.

That reminded me of a school mate who was better at mathematics. His last major job was as head teacher at our school. He retired early because he was convinced that students in maintained schools and colleges could do as well as the streams of leavers he sent on to maths degrees.

He was not allowed to teach without supervision because he lacked a required qualification. In answer to a parliamentary question, it was confirmed that his students achieved more A* maths 'A' levels than maintained schools in any English city.

Our future prosperity will be built better on the growing achievements in all our schools. I love listening to our local education leaders and I am impressed by the bright, lively and learning pupils. Respect for the positive interaction of teachers and children is the reason to try to keep schools open, whenever possible.

We cheer the NHS staff carrying much of the work and care caused by the consequences of the C-19 pandemic. I cheer too the parents and the education staff who adopted remote teaching last year. I hope they will not need to do so again.

My three surviving siblings include a teacher. She was a head for 16 years. A year after retirement, she was asked to lead another school for a year. There had been no singing at assemblies. She found one of the poems that can be sung to the tune Londonderry (Danny Boy). When the song was repeated, everyone joined in. Afterwards, students gathered around to ask if they could sing regularly.

For many years, East Preston's Terence Chapman used his interest and skills for imaginative development of music for students in West Sussex. The all-round development of people of all ages should include the joys and disciplines of music, of sports and every communal activity.

I have been impressed by the slim books of ideas, assemblies and hard-won wisdom by James Handscombe, the polymath and mathematician who established the Harris Westminster Sixth Form to provide academic education for students (he calls them scholars) of all socio-economic backgrounds, developing a scholarly ethos that guides students and staff into successful habits.

Let us, together, endeavour to achieve wider respect, prosperity and security.