

Let Us Agree What Matters Most

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Ukraine has had contested elections. Politics is not always comfortable to observe. By good fortune, their current president and the mayor of Kyiv have been the right people for this critical time. One has been an actor; one has been a champion boxer.

At the 1945 general election, the first for ten years, the electorate preferred Clement Attlee and the Labour party to Winston Churchill and the Conservatives. The two had worked together for most of the war.

Five and six years later, parliamentary arithmetic changed. In 1951, Labour reached a higher total of votes; Conservatives gained a parliamentary majority that lasted for 13 years. Then, smaller proportions of voters switched party.

People in different parties may agree with each other. People in the same party may disagree. Unless they are in government, there can be the freedom to speak out and to vote independently, within reason. In the House of Lords, peers are less bound by the whips' requests to support their party, wrong or right.

Before the Queen's Speech at the State Opening of Parliament on 10th May, the House of Commons will consider Lords amendments to Bills on Health and Social Care, Borders and Nationality, and on Building Safety, affecting many leaseholders, though few in Worthing and district.

I thank government for accepting many of the changes asked for by the campaigning charity Leasehold Knowledge Partnership. I encourage ministers to consider accepting sensible, proportionate Lords amendments.

The list of new Bills will include provisions to sell off Channel 4. I oppose this. Margaret Thatcher and Willie Whitelaw created C4 to be a distinctive, alternative public service broadcaster, funded by advertising, not by government nor by subscription. Note the interest of ITV in taking on or taking over C4. How does that preserve, let alone increase, diversity? It does not. No new owner will maintain the regional benefits of the present set up.

Messages by constituents prompted by 38 degree activists, even on an issue where we agree such as preserving the unique qualities of Channel 4, can appear as an email blizzard, risking serious harm to our ability to spot and to respond to individual requests for assistance or advice.

In present weeks, my dedicated team is devoted to helping Ukrainian refugees and their hosts. Growing numbers of applications are being approved. I speak to ministers several times a week about problems and needed improvements.

My heart is warmed by the practical help being offered. My soul is wrenched when thinking about the innocent lives ruined and lost in Russia's terrible war on its near neighbour.

Much of my attention now and over the years has been given to supporting our schools and colleges. I congratulate heads and their colleagues for the increasingly welcome results. Children and students go each day to purposeful and fulfilling activity. I know Covid restrictions and precautions have been challenging for everyone. On my recent visit to Kamelia Kids day nursery, I admired how they help children in their care.

Overall, let us recognise progress. The proportion of schools rated good or outstanding rose by a third in ten years. Every child changing school at 11 should not be held back by low levels of numeracy or literacy. This requires support for individuals, for selected schools in need and for broad action in some regions.

The aim of the Schools White Paper to level up is the determination not to leave any area behind. How to achieve that is for discussion, with respect for local education authorities and for heads with their governors.

My early public service was on the board of a large failing school. The dominant energy for effective reform came from two mothers who challenged inappropriate ideology.

Let us agree what matters most: order in the school, meeting aspirations of the students and giving support to the good, dedicated and effective teachers.