

Prime Minister's tribute to Sir David Amess MP: 18 October 2021

The passing of 72 hours has done little to numb the shock and sadness we all felt when we heard of the tragic and senseless death of Sir David Amess. This House has lost a steadfast servant, we have lost a dear friend and colleague and Julia and her children have lost a loving husband and devoted father.

Nothing I or anyone else can say will lessen the pain, the grief, the anger they must feel at this darkest of times. We hold them in our hearts today, we mourn with them and we grieve alongside them.

Sir David was taken from us in a contemptible act of violence, striking at the core of what it is to be a Member of this House and violating the sanctity both of the church in which he was killed and the constituency surgery that is so essential to our representative democracy.

But we will not allow the manner of Sir David's death to in any way detract from his accomplishments as a politician or as a human being. Because Sir David was a patriot who believed passionately in this country, in its people, in its future.

He was also one of the nicest, kindest, and most gentle individuals ever to grace these benches.

A man who used his decades of experience to offer friendship and support to new members of all parties. Whose views often confounded expectation and defied easy stereotype. And who believed not just in pointing out what was wrong with society but in getting on and doing something about it.

It was that determination to make this country a better place that inspired his outstanding record on behalf of the vulnerable and the voiceless. The master of the private members bill and 10-minute rule bill he passed legislation on subjects as diverse as animal welfare, fuel poverty and the registration of driving instructors.

He was a prodigious campaigner for children with learning disabilities and for women with endometriosis, a condition in which he became an expert after meeting a woman at one of the constituency surgeries.

Behind the famous and irresistible beam lay a seasoned campaigner of verve and grit whether he was demanding freedom for the people of Iran or courting votes in the Westminster Dog of the Year contest whether he was battling for Brexit or fighting his way to the front of the Parliamentary Pancake Race.

And as every member of this House will know, and you just confirmed Mr Speaker, he never once witnessed any achievement by any resident of Southend that could not, somehow, be cited in his bid to secure city status for that distinguished town.

Highlights of that bulging folder included a world record for playing most triangles being played at once; a group of stilt-walkers travelling non-stop from the Essex coast to Downing Street; and a visiting foreign dignitary allegedly flouting protocol by saying he liked Southend more than Cleethorpes.

A compelling case, Mr Speaker, and as it is only a short time since Sir David last put that case to me in this chamber, I am happy to announce that Her Majesty has agreed that Southend will be accorded the city status it so clearly deserves. That Sir David spent almost 40 years in this House but not one day in ministerial office tells everything about where his priorities lay.

He was not a man in awe of this chamber, nor a man who sought patronage or advancement. He simply wanted to serve the people of Essex, first in Basildon, then in Southend. And it was in the act of serving his constituents that he was so cruelly killed.

In his recent memoir, Sir David called surgeries a part of "the great British tradition of the people openly meeting their elected politicians". Even after the murder of Jo Cox and the savage attacks on Stephen Timms and Nigel Jones he refused to accept that he should be in any way deterred from speaking face to face with his constituents.

And so when he died he was doing what he firmly believed was the most important part of any MP's job: offering help to those in need. In the awful moments before we knew the full horror of the tragedy a member of Sir David's constituency association, her voice breaking with emotion, told an interviewer that "we need him, the country needs him". And we do.

This country needs people like Sir David, this House needs people like Sir David, our politics needs people like Sir David. Dedicated, passionate, firm in his beliefs but never anything less than respectful for those who thought differently.

Those are the values he brought to a lifetime of public service. There can be few among us more justified in their faith in the resurrection and the life to come. And while his death leaves a vacuum that will not and can never be filled, we will cherish his memory we will celebrate his legacy and we will never allow those who commit acts of evil to triumph over the democracy and the Parliament that Sir David Amess loved so much.