

Gareth Snell speech at Stoke-on-Trent Central by-election

“I’d like to begin by saying thank you to the returning officer and their staff for all their work in making sure this election runs smoothly.

“I also must thank my wife, Sophia, and our beautiful daughter, Hannah. Both are a constant source of strength, love and inspiration to me. Without their support, this campaign would not have been possible.

“Can I also thank the police for all that they have done today and throughout the campaign.

“For democracy to work it needs the support of dedicated public servants and here in Stoke-on-Trent we can be proud to have some of the most dedicated in the country.

“I’d also like to thank my agent George Sinnott, and the incredible team of Labour Party workers and volunteers who have sustained this campaign throughout. To see the energy and commitment that all of you have shown these last few weeks is a reminder of the incredible strength and passion of our movement.

“I feel profoundly humble to have been chosen by the people of Stoke-on-Trent Central to represent them in Parliament.

“My wife Sophia and I chose to make our life here and it was the best decision we ever made. I’m proud to call the Potteries my home, and I’m prouder still to have been given the opportunity to represent our city as your next MP.

“In recent weeks Stoke-on-Trent has found itself in the national spotlight. Our city has been the focus of a media which all too often prefers to dwell on our problems instead of highlighting our achievements.

“But over these last few weeks a city lazily dubbed by some as the capital of Brexit has once again proven to the world that we are so much more than that.

"We are a city of innovators and educators, artists and entrepreneurs. We pioneered the first industrial revolution and I believe that we have the potential to lead the next one.

"This city will not allow ourselves to be defined by last year's referendum. And we will not allow ourselves to be divided by the result.

"Nor will we be divided by race, or faith, or creed. We will move forward together to tackle the problems that we face and secure a brighter, more prosperous future for one another.

"So for those who have come to Stoke-on-Trent to sow hatred and division, and to try to turn us away from our friends and neighbours, I have one message – you have failed.

"Tonight the people of Stoke-on-Trent have chosen the politics of hope over the politics of fear. We have said with one voice that hatred and bigotry are not welcome here. This is a proud city and we stand together.

"This election is a victory for British values of tolerance and respect. But it is also a victory for the proud Labour values that are the hallmark of our city and its people.

"It is a message that the people of Stoke-on-Trent won't just sit back while this Tory government cuts our National Health Service to the bone and puts the future of our public services at risk.

"It is a warning that we will not stand idly by while politicians in Westminster pour ever-money into London and the South East while the rest of the country is simply left to fend for itself.

"And it is a demand that the contribution our people have made to this country is respected and rewarded with the support and investment we deserve.

"Politics can be passionate – and there have been moments in this campaign that have polarised people.

"My job – and it is the job of all of us here – will be to put this campaign behind us – and work together.

"For those who voted for me in this election, thank you very much. But for those who did not, or who did not vote at all, I want you to know that I will be your representative as well.

"I will work every day to repay the trust that the people of Stoke-on-Trent have placed in me.

“I will be a strong, local voice that our city needs and I will always put the people of Stoke-on-Trent first. I have a plan for the Potteries, and that plan begins today.”

Cooperation results in significantly improved air quality

Joint cooperation on environmental protection in the past three years between Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province has resulted in significantly improved air quality in the region.

China has promoted the integrated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region in recent years, relocating nonessential functions from Beijing and restructuring the economy in the region, with environmental protection, traffic management and industrial upgrading being prioritized.

In the past three years, the three local governments have expanded cooperation on information sharing, including holding joint emergency meetings, as well as standards drafting, policy-making and joint financing.

Yu Jianhua, chief engineer of the Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau, said the authorities of the three areas formed a mechanism in March 2015 to jointly cope with violations of environmental laws.

At the beginning of last year, Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei unified emergency response standards for severe air pollution.

In April, the three governments unified petroleum emission standards for vehicles.

“Beijing has invested in Hebei’s environmental protection, helping to cut coal use,” Yu said.

According to the bureau, Beijing has invested 962 million yuan (\$139 million) in an air pollution control fund in Hebei in the past two years. Tianjin contributed 800 million yuan to the fund during the same period.

The results have been significant, with the industrial province of Hebei cutting coal use by 3.2 million metric tons in the past two years.

Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei have reduced coal consumption by 40.3 million tons in the past three years and cut iron production capacity by 40 million tons, which has contributed to the improved air quality.

China sees biggest overseas returning wave in recent years

Chinese students celebrate their graduation from Columbia University on May 20, 2015. [photo/Xinhua]

At the National Science and Technology Awards Conference held in Beijing on January, 2017, Ren Xiaobin and his team won the second prize in the 2016 National Natural Science Award.

“It is the best time to do scientific research in China,” said Ren. “China has a larger stage which provides more chances and room for growth. We can expand our ability and achieve greater value of life.”

No one would expect Ren to achieve so much from nothing in only nine years. As one of the second batch of experts enlisted in the national “Recruitment Program of Global Experts”, or Thousand Talents Program, he returned from Japan to establish the Frontier Institute of Science and Technology in Xi’an Jiaotong University and lead a group of young people to conduct research on intelligent material.

Ren is just one of the many outstanding examples of many overseas returnees. Since the program was introduced in 2008, more than 40,000 high-level talents have come back to homeland and have found jobs.

The number of returnees at professor level has been more than 20 times than that of the total number between 1978 and 2008, forming the biggest overseas

returning wave since the founding of the People's Republic of China.

"We are close to realizing the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation than any time in the history and we are eager for talents than any time in the history," said President Xi Jinping at the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Western Returned Scholars Association.

"Most overseas Chinese want to come back to China," said Wang Huiyao, vice-president of the Western Returned Scholars Association.

As China is improving its national strength, the ratio of the number of going abroad and returning people has fallen from 3.15:1 in 2006 to 1.28:1 in 2015. Talents are coming back at an unprecedented speed.

According to official statistics, more than 70 percent of project leaders working at key national research projects are overseas returnees. A large number of academicians at Chinese Academy of Sciences and at China Academy of Engineering are overseas returnees.

Experts estimate that China will transform from the biggest brain drain country into one of the main brain reversal countries in the world in five years.

The change of research environment is a major reason why overseas scholars are choosing to do research in China.

Shao Feng is in charge of a laboratory named after his name at the National Institute of Biological Sciences, Beijing. Two months ago, a research paper produced by his laboratory was published by world-known medical magazine Nature Microbiology, achieving a major breakthrough in the field of bioscience.

Shao said the key to success is that the laboratory is run in a similar mode to international scientific research institutes, breaking the constraints such as budget report, assessment standard, which are usually seen in the traditional management of scientific research.

Favorable policies, exploding high-tech industry, innovative atmosphere and sustainable investment are appealing to more and more overseas students.

Currently, there are more than 300 overseas returnees' pioneer parks and about 24,000 enterprises in the parks across the country, with about 24,000 overseas returnees being employed.

"Many ask me why I came back. My answer is simple: I'm still young and I want to pursue my dream," said Zhu Xiang, 30, who turned down the offer of a research institute in France to start his own business in China.

Zhu with his friends established a mobile medical platform at an incubator in Tsinghua University and now has millions of users. He thinks the fast-growing China now has a very good platform for overseas returnees to realize their aspiration.

Home schooling without permission illegal

The Education Ministry released a notice on its website on Wednesday, stressing that parents or guardians are not allowed to educate children at home without permission from education authorities.

According to the Compulsory Education Law, all school-age children must attend primary and junior middle school.

Schools and local education authorities shoulder the responsibility of finding those children who do not go to school and persuading them to attend, the notice said.

“For children who cannot attend school due to reasons such as poor physical health, their parents or guardians should report to the local education authorities and ask for a delay in enrollment,” the notice said.

“They cannot give children home schooling as a substitute for school education if they fail to gain permission from the authorities.”

The notice was released against a backdrop of an increasing number of students being educated at home or attending small, private teaching institutes.

Research conducted by the 21st Century Education Research Institute estimated that the number of children who receive home schooling rather than attending school in China has risen from 2,000 in 2013 to 6,000 today.

Wang Jiajia, who led the research, said the legality of home schooling had long been controversial in China, but that the increasing number of parents and children wanting to do so demonstrated that the unified, standardized education provided in the nation’s schools cannot meet everyone’s needs.

Perpetrators of recent terrorist attack in Iraq must be held accountable – UN Security Council

23 February 2017 – Condemning, in the strongest terms, the terrorist attack on 16 February in Iraq’s capital, Baghdad, the United Nations Security

Council underlined the need to bring the perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of such reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice.

The attack killed at least 50 people and injured many more.

In a statement, the 15-member Security Council “reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.”

Further, stressing that those responsible for these killings should be held accountable, the Security Council urged all UN Members States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with the Iraqi Government and all other relevant authorities in this regard.

Council members also reiterated that “any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed,” and reaffirmed the need for all UN Member States to combat by all means, in accordance with the UN Charter and other obligations under international law, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

Also in the statement, the Council welcomed the efforts of the Iraqi Government and its partners to defeat Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) and to return stability to the country.