

24.9.15

HAMPSHIRE CHRONICLE

Steve Brine: Letter from Westminster

MILD days and cold nights can only mean one thing; conference season is almost upon us. Things kick off next week with the Labour Party in Brighton followed by the Conservatives in Manchester and then Parliament returns and a seemingly changed political landscape.

The new Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn is someone I know well, having served with him on the Justice Select Committee for the majority of the last Parliament. We travelled together a number of times and I enjoyed getting to know him. We may not agree on many things and I suspect the next five years will be more political than the last but he is a gentleman and he believes passionately in public service.

Whatever happens in the years ahead I predict two things; British politics will be anything but the straight curve many commentators would have us believe and my ballot for PMQ tickets will be busier than ever! If you'd like to come on Wednesday January 6 2016, please enter now via www.stevebrine.com/PMQs

One of the first challenges of the new term came in the form of the Assisted Dying Bill. Thank you to so many of you for writing with your view on this sensitive and hugely controversial issue.

After months of reading, meeting and thinking I voted against the Bill having a second reading. It was a free vote on a matter of conscience and I respect the opinions given to me on both sides but, in the end, I had to make a decision as our MP.

I spoke in the debate and can't possibly cover all the arguments I made here but, as I said in the House, it seems to me we live in a world today obsessed by choice and consumerism. We want that career and the perfect family life, we want to shop every hour of the week and now we want to choose how we die.

I found myself agreeing with the Bishop of Bristol who said how the sponsors of this Bill presented it, in part, as a simple matter of individual choice. "Choice" he said, "being the great God of a consumerised society" and he hits the nail on the head. I think the choice creates the burden, it doesn't set you free.

I spoke to many health professionals ahead of this vote and I actually do believe we do have world-class palliative care in this country but that's not the case everywhere and it is partly fuelling this desire for legal assisted suicide. We must significantly up our game in

respect of how we give end of life care - rather than handing out the right in law to take that life away.

Finally, parents of school-age (and soon to be) Summer-born children will be interested in a debate I spoke in last month. I've been a consistent supporter of a change in the Department for Education guidelines on when the state insists our little ones start primary school and it seems we are getting somewhere. The Government plans to consult later this year on a change which is very welcome.

You can find more information about my continuing work as your local MP, in Winchester and Westminster, via www.stevebrine.com or on 01962 791110.

Steve Brine MP