

'Every child matters,' says Brown

Chancellor Gordon Brown has spoken of how the death of his baby daughter Jennifer helped teach him that "every child is precious".

Speaking at the Hay festival in Powys, Mr Brown said the experience "made me believe that every child matters, they deserve our best endeavours".

"We have a duty as a society for every child to make the best of themselves."

He was invited to talk about his book, *Courage*, the proceeds of which are going to the Jennifer Brown Foundation.

The chancellor's daughter died in 2002. He and his wife Sarah now have two children, aged three and 10 months.

Mr Brown told an audience of more than 1,000 that providing an education for the 80m primary school age children who are without it and preventing five million child deaths from disease were "something that this generation could achieve".

In a wide-ranging interview with Mariella Frostrup, Mr Brown promised to draw up proposals for constitutional reform "within a few weeks" intended to "create a better mechanism for people to become more involved".

'Taken seriously'

He praised the Make Poverty History movement and recognised how people were turning to pressure groups more than political parties.

Mr Brown, who is soon to take over as prime minister, said he had learned over the last 10 years that politics was not just about "pulling a lever and dictating from on high".

"I'm saying I've changed my view, I don't think you can solve problems without consulting people."

Rather than a government of the people it was "government involving the people".

He recognised people could e-mail, blog, text and petition, and had also in recent months "privately and quietly" experienced for himself citizens' forums.

"People deserve to have their views taken seriously, not just instant response - debate.

"I'd like to usher in a great national debate, where people can contribute and where we are ready to listen and learn," he added.

MP opt-out

During audience questions Mr Brown won applause when he criticised the freedom of information exemption for MPs' expenses.

"It will be corrected, I hope," he said.

On the media glare he and his family will face when he becomes prime minister, Mr Brown said he had to accept it but would want to protect his children.

"People want to know who you are, what you're doing and what makes you tick. People have a right to know all that in modern politics."

But he derided the Big Brother culture where people were "famous just from appearing on TV," rather than achieving or inventing something.

Mr Brown said the world had changed from the one he grew up in, with children exposed to the internet, commercials and "video violence".

As for the government's role, he said: "We should be there to do more. I don't consider this the nanny state, not censoring or being heavy-handed, but parents and teachers need our support to deal with a more complicated set of problems than my

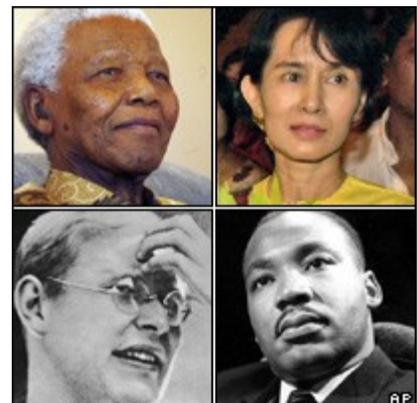


An overflow area at the Hay festival, with Gordon Brown's event a sell-out

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Gordon Brown



Four of Mr Brown's eight heroes, featured in his book *Courage*

parents had to deal with."

Brown will not block secrecy bid

Gordon Brown has rejected calls to block a controversial move by MPs to get out of freedom of information laws.

MPs pushed the plan closer to becoming law earlier in what critics called a "shameful day for Parliament".

The MPs say they want to protect private letters from constituents - but critics say the move would also allow them to keep their expenses secret.

Mr Brown, who takes over as Labour leader and prime minister next month, has pledged more "open" politics.

A spokesman for the chancellor said he had also promised not to dictate to MPs.

"Gordon has also spoken about the sovereignty of Parliament. If MPs have voted this measure through then that is a matter for them", his spokesman said.

'Ashamed'

Critics say despite its neutral stance, the government is in favour of the Private Members' Bill and has allowed it the time to progress through Parliament.

Liberal Democrat MP Norman Baker, who has led calls to block the Freedom of Information (Exemption) Bill, claims MPs were prevented from debating it more fully earlier, saying the events made him "ashamed to be an MP".

He is to make a formal complaint to the Commons speaker after MPs voted for the bill, by 96 to 25, to give the bill a third reading. It will now proceed to the Lords for further consideration.

Mr Baker and fellow critics had hoped to "talk out" the bill by using up all its allocated time in the Commons, but after a five-hour debate, and with five minutes to go before time ran out, supporters voted for it to proceed to the Lords.

'Flickering candle'

If passed, the FOI bill would effectively remove both the Commons and House of Lords from the list of public authorities obliged to release information under the 2000 act, which came into force in 2005.

The bill also protects all MPs' correspondence from release and stops authorities, such as councils or companies, confirming or denying whether they have received a letter from an MP.

During the debate, Mr Baker described the Freedom of Information Act as "a flickering candle" which "could be extinguished in many ways" by the bill.

"Let me make it plain the best solution

entirely is that this bill doesn't go through because the present arrangements are working really quite well and there is no need to change them."

After the vote, he vowed to continue his fight to block the bill.

"It is an affront for the House of Commons to make the deeply hypocritical move of exempting itself from a law that applies to every other public body in the country."

Ministers

He continued: "It is also deeply undemocratic that MPs on both the government and Conservative benches have clearly collaborated to ensure that those with a contrary view, fighting for open government, were silenced after barely any debate on amendments to the bill."



Mr Brown has pledged to respect MPs' decisions

“ My bill is necessary to give an absolute guarantee that the correspondence of members of parliament, on behalf of our constituents and others, to a public authority remains confidential ”

David Maclean

[Q&A: Freedom of Information](#)

[In full: MPs who backed bill](#)

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Norman Baker

Several ministers voted in favour of third reading, including Caroline Flint, Phil Woolas, Joan Ryan, Meg Munn, Ian McCartney, Tony McNulty, Parmjit Dhanda, and Maria Eagle.

Members of the backbench committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party have also emailed colleagues to say they "feel strongly" that the bill's measures were "worthy of support".

Tory backbencher David Maclean, who is sponsoring it, said it would protect MPs' correspondence.

During the debate, Mr Maclean said his bill was necessary "to give an absolute guarantee that the correspondence of members of parliament, on behalf of our constituents and others, to a public authority remains confidential".