

Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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Alderman Pat Murray

It has been an honour and a privilege to work with Pat Murray for more years now than I care to remember. Indeed Pat and I were fellow councillors in Chandless Ward when I was first elected to Gateshead council in 1972. Pat represented particularly challenging areas of inner-city Gateshead and always worked tirelessly for the people there and has played a major part in shaping the Gateshead that we see today. I was delighted to be able to join fellow Alderman and Councillors when Pat was made an Honorary Alderman of the Borough of Gateshead.

Deckham Community Centre

With the aid and hard work of Cllr Brian Coates, this project goes from strength to strength. Its a fantastic example of how the Labour Government's investment is now reaching so many. I presented achievement award certificates to Sharon and Derek Elliott who have benefited from courses taken at the centre



Gateshead Carers'



I joined the Mayor and Mayoress at the Gateshead Carers' Open Day, a celebration of the hard work and tremendous efforts made by so many to help some of the most vulnerable in our society (pictured above with Jimmy Miller, Carers' Association Chair and Bill Llewellyn, Treasurer)

Gateshead College - Baltic Campus Site



One of the integral pieces in the regeneration of the Gateshead quayside, the new Gateshead College Campus will open in January 2008 offering state of the art facilities on a fantastic campus to truly open up the most fantastic opportunities in further education to all our young people. (left, on site with Principal David Cheetham)

Conference in the Caymans

A tough job, but someone had to do it - I was asked to represent the UK at a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference where topics under discussion included dealing with disaster, encouraging young people to achieve their full potential, climate change and waste disposal. (right, taking a break with CPA International Secretary Dr William Shija)



Bus Buddies' Downing Street Petition

I am working in support of Regional Youth Assembly representatives' campaigning for fair regional concessionary bus travel for young people aged 14 - 19 in full time education or accredited training across the North East. I arranged for them to go to Downing Street, where they handed in a postcard petition and later, along with Association of North East Councils representatives, met with the Northern Group of Labour MPs and new North East Minister Nick Brown to discuss this and other regional issues.



Outside Number 10 With Mick Henry and young petitioners

Comment

Gordon Brown's government had a baptism of fire, almost literally. As if we could forget, the recent failed attempts to explode **car bombs** in London and at Glasgow airport - and the incredible news that the perpetrators were from the medical profession, known more for commitment to healing and helping humanity not killing and maiming it - and the details of the prosecutions of the failed July '05 bombers, serve to remind us that the war on terrorism can't afford to lose any of its impetus.

Nor can we ignore natural disasters. The aftermath of severe **flooding** in North Yorkshire is still very much evident - although I wonder if it had been Chelsea rather than Hull and Leeds still half submerged in mud, whether there would have been more of a national outcry?

But the topic that seems to have driven most constituents to contact me is the national **ban on smoking in public places**. Let me reiterate - the Houses of Parliament are also subject to the ban: there is a ban on smoking in all buildings in the Palace of Westminster. MPs have not given themselves an exemption. Indeed, there has been no smoking in the Palace of Westminster for the last 5 years, apart from one 'smoking room', and that went too on 1 July.



Parliament

That's it then, the end' and **Tony Blair** walked off leaving centre stage to Gordon Brown and his new deputy leader, Harriet Harman. Notwithstanding Alistair Campbell's diaries (how do these people find the time to write such detailed notes at such incredibly pressurised times?) I think history will be much kinder to Tony Blair and his legacy than many of his own party members are prepared to be right now, but the fact remains that Gordon Brown has a dauntingly steep hill to climb if he is to regain the confidence and trust

of the British electorate

But what a cracking start he has made! For centuries, the legislative programme has been announced in the Queen's Speech at the beginning of a Parliamentary session. But the new Prime Minister wants to open up the process, and consult on measures that will be in the Queens Speech.

Priorities are **Education, Employment, Housing and Health**. So a new Housing Bill will seek to increase the numbers of affordable homes built, a Planning Bill will speed up the development of the major infrastructure projects Britain needs, there will be new measures to help with mortgages, a **Local Transport Bill** will help improve public transport and tackle congestion, a **Children in Care Bill** will do more to protect vulnerable children, a **Child Maintenance Bill** will protect children from poverty when their parents split up, and the **Unclaimed Assets Bill** will use money lying in dormant bank accounts to help young people. I spoke on the latter point - pointing out that Gateshead Alzheimer's Society argue that these monies were from elderly people and should therefore be used to help elderly people and their carers.

The Prime Minister also made a Statement on **constitutional reform** which aims to relinquish many executive powers - no going to war without democratic agreement, no more cronyism with all appointments coming under public scrutiny, to cite just two new measures.

I was also encouraged by New Health Secretary **Alan Johnson's** admission that the government had got it wrong with some aspects of previous health service reforms, with the resultant loss of support from health professionals. So I'm looking forward to his plans to limit future changes to a bit of fine-tuning and give the NHS a sustained period of organisational and financial stability.

Excellent news too, on the education front, with **changes to the student maintenance grant system** that will give full grants to students from households with incomes up to £25,000 - at present, full grants go only to those from households with incomes up to £17,500.

And good news, in the announcement of **Ministers for the Regions**, with **Nick Brown** as Minister for the North East. There is need for clarification on the role and powers of the new regional ministers but there is real potential for meaningful regional progress. I met with (then) Bus Minister Gillian Merron to talk about the Concessionary Fares Bill and the continuing concerns we have about the financing of the 2008 'National' scheme in Tyne and Wear.



Constituency

Many congratulations to **Gary Haley** on his victory in the Dunston Teams byelection. He will be a real asset to Gateshead Council.

I attended **Gateshead Carers' Association** Open Day; and met with **Gateshead Alzheimer's Society** carers and workers where much of the discussion centred upon the medical care for those with Alzheimer's' and the real daily problems faced by carers. I am still hopeful of good news relating to the **Carers' Allowance** - a review of the allowance is currently taking place and, in answer to me last Wednesday, the PM hinted it would report soon.

I have had discussion with the **North East Councils Association**, and met with Richard Hibbert who is leading the **Transport Innovation Fund** (TIF) work currently looking at transport patterns across Tyne and Wear and, inevitably, the congestion charge question.