

The Big Issue

The big issue is homelessness. No it's not, it's trade justice. No – it's abortion, housing, AIDS, education, health... . In a world of single-issue campaigns, how can we see the big picture – and work out what are really big issues? Andrew Selous helps us get a clearer view.

MPs are bombarded daily by pressure groups asking that they adopt a particular stance on all manner of policy issues. On my very first day in Parliament, on the Monday immediately following the election in 2001, I found 112 such letters awaiting my arrival. I did not know I would be elected until early on Friday morning of the week before, so these national organisations had moved pretty fast to get my attention!

Seeing the big picture

HOW IS IT possible to make sense of such requests and prioritise them? To agree to all such policy demands would very probably lead to a level of taxation that would hugely burden individual and corporate tax payers, quite possibly reducing the total tax take available for our public services.

It is important to be honest about the costs of policy proposals and to clearly identify who will pay for the policies advocated. It is also necessary to think through the impact of policy on other areas, something single issue pressure groups do not always do.

The reality of an MP's working life is that we do not have the time to become really

knowledgeable about a huge range of policy issues and so most MPs try to maintain a working knowledge of all major issues of public policy and then specialise in a few areas of public interest and concern to them.

Most MPs will have sought to enter politics because they feel very passionate or angry about certain issues. Once elected, MPs are confronted with a wide range of problems brought to them by their constituents and these concerns, often expressed face-to-face with raw emotion, will also focus MPs' minds on what their priorities should be.

Family breakdown

BEFORE I CAME into Parliament, I had been deeply saddened by the emotional costs and poverty caused by family breakdown and the strains this escalating problem imposed on so many of our public services. Once elected, I saw that over a third of my constituency surgery cases had a marriage, relationship or parenting breakdown as the original cause of

Andrew Selous



Andrew Selous is the MP for South West Bedfordshire where he lives with his wife Harriet and their three young daughters. Before he entered Parliament he was a re-insurance underwriter insuring some of the world's poorest countries against the effects of natural disasters. He was also a Territorial Army Officer.

Since entering Parliament in 2001 he has served on the Work and Pensions committee, been Parliamentary Private Secretary to Michael Ancram, the shadow Foreign Secretary, and is now an Opposition Whip. In his maiden speech he said that he hoped that the Conservative party would become the party for the poor and disadvantaged.

the benefits, housing, social services or child support issue that my constituents were coming to see me about.

This issue remains one of the driving forces for my political life. I am concerned at how little effort we put into practical support and encouragement to equip people to have strong, healthy marriages and family relationships. But I am also encouraged by the positive work that countries as diverse as Singapore, America, Malaysia and Australia are doing in this area.

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spiritual resources to sustain it. Support from my wife, my church, and a small group of friends I meet to pray with every Sunday before church have been key for me. And a prayer group in the House of Commons has also been very important.

But it is quite right to count the cost before embarking along this road.

We need a growing number of Christians in politics, prepared to run with perseverance the race which is set before us

If you are being called to run the race, I hope you will respond to the call.