

Annual Luncheon of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee

The Guest of Honour at the Annual Lunch on Wednesday 26th November was the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon David Cameron MP.

"The first thing I want to say is to wish you a very Happy Birthday. You've done extremely well to keep going in Parliament for this many years and you've had an extraordinary impact on Parliament, so Happy Birthday and thank you for what you have done.

I should start with an apology because I am an Arts Graduate so I feel a bit of a fraud. The only science I did was one of the dismal sciences – reading Politics Philosophy and Economics at Oxford so I'm not sure I am really qualified.

I want to make a couple of points. The heritage we have in this country of science is something we should be



Andrew Miller MP, Stephen Mosley MP, Rt Hon David Cameron MP, Lord Oxburgh and Dr Stephen Benn

incredibly proud of. Think of the inventions – everything from the world wide web to penicillin, to the jet engine, to the television, to the Higgs Boson, to the unravelling of DNA – we have an incredibly proud science heritage.

But the real reason I wanted to come and say a few words is that I think science is going to be even more vital to our future than it has been to our past. We have to compete with other countries for our share of success in the world. The only way you win a race is to play to your strengths. When you think what Britain's strengths are – we can all name a few, apart from our weather and our ability to lose at sports we invented. We have the English language, we have got our great Universities, our tradition of finance and trading around the world but

one of our greatest strengths is our science base, and our ability to go on pushing the boundaries, inventing and exploiting science.

I see this as a key part of our future and the work that you do to connect Parliamentarians to science is vital. That is the most significant thing I want to say. I see this as a very important part of what we do. That is why we have not cut the Science Budget; we have increased it. That is why we are investing in science in our schools and encouraging people to study STEM subjects. That is why we are looking at how to improve the teaching of science, not least computer sciences. Teaching coding in our schools is vitally important. This is vital to our future. Keep on doing what you are doing.

The second point is there is something I want you to help us with. There is a danger in our country and across the European Union. We can sometimes let an anti-science culture grow up. We see this in all sorts of different ways. We are at the forefront of making sure that we cure genetic diseases by having a permissive regime by looking at stem cell and other sciences.

Nuclear power is a vital scientific area of endeavour, a vital industry for our country, but I sit at those European Council meetings and I see country after country, including now, sadly, Germany, arguing against nuclear power.

I don't like the word fracking, I prefer "unconventional gas", but we should be doing all we can to make sure we recover



Lord Oxburgh and Andrew Miller MP

unconventional gas as well as conventional gas. Again we face a slightly anti-science culture in Europe when we try to do it.

The fourth area I would mention would be GM. We have some of the finest areas of scientific endeavour in terms of making sure that we can feed a planet of what will one day be 9 billion people. Again there is a slightly – very – anti-GM culture sometimes in Britain but a lot in Europe.

I've named four areas. You are scientists. You can name a lot more where we need to take on the doubters, and often some who are actually quite ignorant about these issues and really make a campaign and have a fight about it.

Science is essential to our future. Keep doing what you are doing and help us win the battle in arguing for scientific advance. Politicians cannot do it on our own. We need scientists,

universities, professors, researchers to step up to the plate and make the argument too – otherwise the argument on nuclear, on GM, on unconventional gas on embryology will all go the wrong way.

I hope you have a lovely lunch. I am sorry to tell you that as soon as you have finished your



Ian Taylor and Rt Hon Lord Jenkin of Roding



Professor Peter Silley and Dr Lucy Harper

lunch you've got to get back to work. The point of Committees like this is to have a forward-looking agenda and I hope I've given you an idea of what I think that agenda needs to be: take on the doubters, take on the arguments, win for science and you'll be winning for Britain as well. Thank you very much indeed."



Sir William Stewart and Dr Richard Worswick



Marijke Smith, Tony Harding and Andrew Furlong



Lord Kirkwood and Lord Walton of Detchant

