

HOUSE OF LORDS HANSARD
DEBATE ON THE QUEEN'S SPEECH
Monday 16 May 2022

Baroness Drake

(Lab)

... Finally, I look forward to hearing the maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. I am newly discovering Suffolk as my daughter and granddaughters have gone there, so I shall listen intently to his contribution.

4.19pm

The Lord Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

(Maiden Speech)

It is a huge honour to be able to address your Lordships' House today. I thank noble Lords for kind words and acts of welcome. I have been very struck by the kindness and warmth of the staff who work here and who have supported me in my early faltering steps. I regret that a bout of Covid last week prevented me attending at all, but I look forward to building a pattern of regular engagement in the work of this House.

I have had the joy and privilege of serving the people of the diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, which comprises most of the wonderful county of Suffolk, for the past seven years. I previously served in Scunthorpe, New York City, St Louis, Missouri, Westminster, the Isle of Dogs and Cambridge, and I simply reflect on the curious ways of the Church of England that I ended up serving a largely rural diocese.

It has been a journey of great discovery, learning about rural life, agriculture, care of the land and the environment, the conditions of increasing rural poverty and isolation, and the challenges particularly facing young people, which are hidden behind picture postcard scenes of beautiful landscapes and coastline. It is these concerns and experiences I hope to bring to the attention of the House and Her Majesty's Government.

I note with considerable interest that Her Majesty's Government intend to bring forward an energy Bill with the aspiration to tackle three related concerns, as we have heard: the affordability of energy, energy security and the urgent need to transition to cleaner energy in response to the climate crisis. I know that I and colleagues on this Bench, including my right reverend friend the Bishop of Manchester, who until a moment ago was sitting next to me, will be following this Bill closely.

I believe that the climate crisis is the multiplying factor for all the other crises we face. Global temperature rises will dramatically increase the global refugee crisis and food shortages, and the geopolitical impact will continue to be magnified. We must pursue the determined course set at COP 26, where we take actions—challenging actions—now for the sake of the long term. If we do not hold the net-zero targets before our eyes at all times and hold to the determination to achieve them, all our other crises will be multiplied.

In a rural county such as Suffolk, we are acutely aware of the challenges of determining what the long-term cost-effective forms of renewable energy really are, and that they do not undermine other environmental goals such as maintaining biodiversity. We know, of course, that changing hearts and minds requires determined leadership. I am pleased to acknowledge the leadership of the Bishop of Norwich, who heads up the climate crisis response for the Church of England, and in my own diocese it is the suffragan Bishop of Dunwich, who has a vested interest since most of his see is already under the sea and he cannot afford to lose any more.

I acknowledge too with gratitude the aspiration on the part of the Government of the United Kingdom to be a global leader in responding to the challenges of energy security without compromising our response to the climate crisis.

Many of us have made personal commitments to respond to this because we feel compelled by the nature of the crisis, and we know that we cannot expect others to do what we are not willing to do ourselves. One of my various modest actions is to start growing trees from seed, one for each of the 478 churches in the diocese, as a gift to honour Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee as part of the green canopy programme. Having had a faltering start a year ago—where planting 400 seeds and overwintering them generated a mere 18 hornbeam—to my surprise I now have some 470 hornbeam and field maple seedlings safely thriving in my greenhouse. Yet it is an act the full fruit of which I will never see. I might say it is an act of faith and I believe it is in this spirit that we should approach the issues of energy and the climate crisis. It is time for implementation and action—acting now for the long-term future and acting with clear and committed leadership.

4.24pm

Lord Howell of Guildford
(Con)

My Lords, it is a huge pleasure to follow the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich in his maiden speech. I note in passing that St Edmundsbury Cathedral celebrated its 1,000-year anniversary last weekend, so the right reverend Prelate is in a position to take the long view on certain things. He has huge international experience combined with parish experience on the ground—both angles. He is engaged, I have been informed, in a “Transforming Effectiveness” project in the Church of England. I think we could all do with a bit of transforming of effectiveness, so maybe he will take the lead on that as well. I note personally that he is an honorary canon of Ely Cathedral, a most graceful and beautiful cathedral and certainly my favourite. Aside from all that, his is just the voice we want here in London on the great social and other challenges that he has mentioned; I hope that we will hear a very great deal more from him.