
JOHN BERCOW

Speaker of the House of Commons, 2009-2019

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The Rt Hon John Bercow served as a Member of Parliament for 22 years, the last 10 of which were as Speaker of the House of Commons. When he retired on 31st October 2019, he had become one of the most recognisable and iconoclastic figures in British politics, and had created a vacancy of huge importance.

As Speaker since 2009, John had a ringside seat during one of the most febrile periods in modern British history, presiding over the Commons while it had to contend with key issues such as austerity in the light of the financial crisis; the coalition government between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats; and of course the most intractable problem of all – how to deliver on the 2016 referendum decision that Britain should leave the EU.

John Bercow served as the 157th Speaker of the House of Commons and was the first since World War II to keep order in front of four Prime Ministers.

John entered Parliament in 1997 as Conservative MP for Buckingham, and he represented the constituency continuously until his retirement in 2019. In June 1999, John Bercow was appointed Front Bench Spokesman for Education & Employment. In July 2000, he was appointed Front Bench Spokesman for Home Affairs. In September 2001, he was appointed Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury. From July 2002 to November 2002, he was Shadow Minister for Work & Pensions. From November 2003 to September 2004, he was Shadow Secretary of State for International Development.

In September 2007, John was appointed by Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, to lead a review of services for children and young people affected by speech, language and communication needs – which resulted in millions of additional funding.

John was appointed to the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation in November 2008. The Conference was asked to 'consider, and make recommendations for rectifying, the disparity between the representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in the House of Commons and their representation in the UK population at large'.

John took over from Speaker Martin on 22nd June 2009 with a mission to "strengthen the backbenches and recognise that Parliament is more than a rubber-stamping operation for the government of the day". He was re-elected three times over a 10-year period.

Resigning the position on 31st October 2019, in a stream of tributes on his departure, even critics admitted that he had delivered on the original promise.

Speaker Bercow built a reputation as a reformer. On one level he dispensed with knee breeches, silk stockings and buckled court shoes. More significantly, he increased the use of 'Urgent Questions' requiring Ministers to make 685

statements on pressing issues, extended the time for PMQs, and replaced the shooting range with a nursery.

He introduced Barack Obama to address both Houses of Parliament, but opposed an invitation to Donald Trump on grounds of racism and sexism. He was also the first Speaker to allow the UK Youth Parliament to debate in the Commons chamber, and went on to chair the event for ten years.

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