

Tribute: Breffni O'Connor, President of the Students' Representative Council

To the Kennedy family; members of the University community; distinguished guests -- it is an honour to speak today on behalf of the students at University of Glasgow to commemorate a life like no other, a great alumni, and a dear friend to many, Charles Kennedy.

It is a difficult task to eulogize a man of such high esteem, a man who played a remarkable role in the history of the UK, and of the University of Glasgow. A man whose actions strengthened this country and enriched the lives of students and all members of this University's community.

Charles was one of the first figures that I, and many of my peers would have encountered at this University, he was there to welcome us at the momentous Freshers' Address, giving up his time to tell us how it was in the old days. And along with rehashing memories of his time here, at each Freshers' Address he delivered an important lesson, which read:

"It's very important you graduate with a degree but remember the University gives you your degree, but the student bodies give you your education". Charles Kennedy knew us, because he was one of us. He knew the ambitions of students, and he recognised the value of every aspect of the student experience offered at Glasgow and encouraged us to make the most of that.

The students here remember his gestures; large and small, from visiting the SRC executive office, to speaking out at Westminster in support of post study work visas; gestures which demonstrated to us that his compassion for students permeated every level

As I prepared for today I did not want to just capture the facts and dates that made his life, rather the true essence behind Charles' life, a life which has left a cherished legacy at this University. My own personal adoration for him can be summoned up in a quote from Charles himself when he was elected leader of the Liberal Democrats where he

said “I pledge to you today that I am going to stand up above all else for social justice, we have to give voice to the disadvantaged and dispossessed”

During his campaign for a 2nd term as Rector, Charles was still an MP, yet took the time to stand out on library hill campaigning alongside representatives from the GUU, QMU and GUSA. In that race he won over 82% of the vote highlighting the support, admiration and love held for him by the students here.

He took action; both on a local and national level to protect the rights and opportunities of students. He showed the power of reason and argument; beginning in the GUU debating chamber and cumulating in the House of Commons. A man of integrity and fairness, he voted against the introduction of tuition fees and was the first to raise ethical investment in the University Court. This step ultimately led to University of Glasgow being the first university in Europe to divest from the Fossil Fuel industry.

Given the scope of his accomplishments, and the adoration he so rightly earned, we remember him as not only as an icon or hero, but as a friend and mentor. He was so full of good humour and maybe in his GUU days, mischief, that we adored him so much.

This is an occasion for us to remind each other that what matters is not material; rather it is about compassion, and what part we can play in making the lives of those around us better. A notion we at Glasgow saw Charles epitomise as student, rector and role model.

Charles gave an interview after the 1992 General Election where he said of politics, “if you’ve got it in the blood, you’ve got it in the blood and you keep going”. He had the University of Glasgow in the blood, just like many of us do; he had GUU, QMU, GUSA and SRC in his blood, just like many of us do.

Most of all though Charles had compassion in his blood, just like many of us here today aspire to. We now have the opportunity to uphold his legacy and follow in his footsteps.

What a magnificent man, we will miss him deeply.