

Marie Goldman

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Conferences offer the opportunity to connect with like-minded people



Marie Goldman MP speaking at Bubu's Cafe
PHOTOS: MARIE GOLDMAN

AS I type this, I've just returned home from York where I was attending this year's Liberal Democrat Spring Conference. I think I've mentioned before in this column that when I first got involved in politics – ten years ago this year – I initially found the concept of giving up a weekend to travel to another part of the country to talk about politics a little strange. But that all changed when I went to my first conference and discovered that it's about far more than policy discussions and debates in a big auditorium.

For me, far more importantly, my party conferences are about the opportunity to connect with like-minded people from across the country; a chance to remind each other that we have friends in the farthest reaches of the British Isles, all giving up their time, their energy and their money too, to campaign to make our country an even better place to live. There's something amazing about that, and I never fail to return from conference – spring or autumn – reinvigorated and re-enthused from the conversations I've had with fellow Liberal Democrat politicians, campaigners and the wider Lib Dem family.

I'm not sure the other parties' conferences are quite like that, but ours is very much a chance to meet old friends and make new ones. Long may that continue – I think it makes politics a nicer place to be.

The main feature of any party conference is the leader's speech – a keynote address, in our case the final big speech of the weekend, and given by our party leader, Sir Ed Davey.

This is an opportunity for the leader of the party to set out the challenges and opportunities that he (or she, depending on who the leader is, of course) sees as being before us. It's also a chance to remind the campaigners in the room how important their contribution is to the cause, what we are collectively fighting for and why it matters so much. Sometimes, it's easier to know what dangers we are presented with than others – this was one of those times.

Ed was clear-eyed in his speech about the dangers of the world around us, including the current unreliability of one of our closest and most powerful allies, the United States of America. While he



Marie Goldman MP speaking at IWD Fair in Parliament

recognised that this is a fairly recent shift, brought about by the current occupant of the White House, Ed was right to point out the weakness of our reliance on missile technology leased from the US as part of our nuclear deterrent. His proposal is to get to work right now to change that – to build our own capability using British technology, engineering and skills. Yes, it will take time, but it will create investment, jobs and, ultimately, better security for our country. I think it's the right call and I'm proud to back it.

You can watch Ed Davey's full speech to the Liberal Democrat 2026 Spring Conference on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUm9r5qL4Do>.

Sunday, March 8 this year was International Women's Day (for those wondering, International Men's Day is Thursday, November 19, and there were lots of events that I attended to celebrate the occasion, both in Chelmsford and in Parliament.

In Chelmsford, I went to a special, women-only beer brewing event at the Brewhouse and Kitchen opposite Chelmsford train station. It was fascinating learning about the different processes that go into brewing beer, and to see it happening right in front of our eyes in the huge equipment that you see when you walk into the Brewhouse, on the left. Of course, it was rather lovely to sample some of the end product, too! Not a bad way to spend a Sunday lunchtime!

I also attended a wonderful community event at Bubu's Café in Great Baddow, bringing together women, girls (and yes, a few boys and men too) to talk about their different experiences and to remind each other that we

are all here to support each other – and isn't the world better when we do that, and work together rather than against each other? Such a lovely event – and I was honoured to be asked to contribute a few words to the discussion. Thanks for inviting me.

In Westminster last week, I had the privilege of being one of the invited speakers at an International Women's Day Fair, organised by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Women and Work. Following on from excellent speakers such as Mims Davies MP and my Lib Dem colleague, Christine Jardine MP, is never easy, but I was keen to remind the audience that while we have made lots of progress in getting women into positions of power in the workplace, including in Parliament, there's still a lot of work to do.

One of the biggest challenges is around women's healthcare. Women still struggle to be heard and understood by some healthcare professionals who really should know better.

Take, for example, the true story I told about a young parliamentary staffer. She had related to me her own experience of finally getting an appointment to see a specialist consultant about an issue she suffers with which means she is unable to stand or walk around for long periods of time without physically needing to throw up. As an example of how it affects her life, she told the consultant that she had recently been on a shopping trip to Westfield, which she'd had to cut short as she couldn't continue for fear of being sick.

Far from sympathising and asking further questions to get to the bottom of her symptoms, the male consultant saw fit to joke with this young woman that he often felt sick when going shopping with his wife... I mean, seriously??!!

Anyway, like I said, there's a LOT of work still to do, but maybe with 40 per cent of MPs in Parliament being women, progress will be just a little bit easier. If you're a woman, and have experienced anything similar, please do let me know. I'm keen to share stories like this so I can encourage the Government to do more to tackle this sort of issue, especially as women & equalities spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats.

Thanks for reading.

Marie