

Turning politics into a spectacular event

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Today is World Sight Day, organised by the World Health Organisation as part of its Vision 2020 campaign to eliminate by 2020 the avoidable blindness that affects 28m people worldwide.

This year's theme is low vision and where better for a laser eye clinic to promote its services than the Houses of Parliament, where turning a blind eye and political short-sightedness are routine clichés.

So Professor Dan Reinstein of London Vision Clinic gave eye tests to 29 parliamentarians earlier this week. They included Malcolm Wicks, energy minister, Lord (Tom) King, the former Tory defence secretary, and Ed Vaizey, the Cameroon MP for Wantage and Didcot who admitted to regularly washing his contact lenses down the sink.

The lords, ladies and MPs proved to be pretty well kitted out when it came to glasses and lenses. While a typical sample of the population would find one in three wearers with the wrong prescription, only one of the 29 parliamentarians needed to change eyewear.

But only four of the 26 who were over 40 had had the full eye examination that Reinstein recommends, which inspects the retina by dilating the pupil. This can pick up cardiovascular and neurological problems as well as eye diseases in their early stages - a whole new meaning for what George Bush senior called "the vision thing".

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