

COURT 4, ROYAL COURTS OF JUSTICE

1 October 2025

My Lord Chancellor, it is a very great pleasure to welcome you, your family and your many friends and supporters to court 4 today.

It is becoming a tradition on these occasions for appointments to your great office to mark a constitutional first. Your swearing-in marks the first appointment, not before time, of a black Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice. And Deputy Prime Minister. We congratulate you on your appointment to each of these important offices of State. Your dual role confirms that justice remains at the heart of the government's agenda.

We also take this opportunity to wish your predecessor well in her new office. It was only a matter of months ago that she tempted fate at the City of London's dinner for His Majesty's Judges at the Mansion House by hoping that she might well be the first Lord Chancellor in quite some time to attend three dinners. That is not to be.

My immediate predecessor spoke of having worked with as many Lord Chancellors as Henry VIII had had wives (if you count Dominic Raab twice). I will have worked with three Lord Chancellors in only two years. As many Lord Chancellors as John of Gaunt had wives. We very much hope to build a strong and enduring partnership with you, my Lord Chancellor, in the years to come.

My Lord Chancellor, as you yourself have said recently, justice has been the constant thread of your career. You studied law at SOAS and were called to the Bar by Lincoln's Inn in 1994. Pupillage at Serjeants' Inn Chambers followed, with Adrian Hopkins KC as your pupil supervisor. You gained early experience of advocacy through working for the Free Representation Unit, particularly representing clients who sought compensation for criminal injuries. You also gained experience working on Privy Council death row appeals from Jamaica and for individuals arrested on drug-trafficking charges in Thailand. Having gained an international perspective on the practical application of the law, you then completed a LLM at Harvard – the first black Briton to do so – before practising law in the United States.

Having practised there for three years – and I think I may be right in saying that you are also the first Lord Chancellor to have practised law there – you returned to the UK and embarked on your political career. You were, as you have said in the past, the kind of lawyer who was attracted to policy, who wished to change the way the world is for the good.

Your political career started here in London as a member of the London Assembly in early 2000. But only for a short time. Parliament beckoned. And you became MP for Tottenham later that year and have held the seat since then. Although an Arsenal

supporter, I make no comment on North London football rivalries, other than to note that your seat is remarkably close to the home of your favourite football team which, I believe, has seen some recent success. Our next match is 22 November... and if you want to keep the Prime Minister happy...

Once in Parliament you gained significant experience both in the Shadow Cabinet and the Cabinet. In the early years of your career you were Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the, then, newly minted Department of Constitutional Affairs and then in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. You also held office as Minister of State for Culture and then for Higher Education and Intellectual Property. In Opposition, and more recently and more relevantly for present purposes, you shadowed your current office and that of Foreign Secretary. It was no surprise then following last year's General Election, that you were appointed Foreign Secretary. And now Lord Chancellor. I know from my early conversations with you how much you enjoyed your time as Shadow Lord Chancellor and are looking forward to returning to the justice system.

My Lord Chancellor, it is readily apparent to all that you bring a wealth of experience to your ancient office. You have a deep understanding of law and the legal system, or should I say legal systems, given your international experience. You, particularly, have a breadth of knowledge of the criminal justice system, both from your time shadowing your current office but also – and importantly – from the historic Independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System, which you were commissioned to carry out in 2017 by the then Government. That knowledge and understanding of the justice system will, I have no doubt, be of real benefit in respect of the recently completed Gauke and Leveson Reviews and their reform recommendations.

More broadly though, your international and diplomatic experience, particularly that most recently gained as Foreign Secretary, makes you well-placed to recognise the importance of judicial diplomacy and the international work done by our judges, including our contribution to promoting judicial excellence across borders and the contribution of our internationally valued justice system to the economic growth of the UK. I very much look forward to your support, and your insights, in respect of these judicial initiatives and upholding the reputation of the UK justice sector as we both work, in our constitutionally distinct ways, to further the rule of law and the international rule-based order that it both depends upon and furthers.

My Lord Chancellor, upholding the constitutional principle of the rule of law and that of judicial independence are, of course, of fundamental importance to your office and to the health of not only our justice system but of our democratic system. At our very first meeting you volunteered at the outset that defending the judges was a priority, and you spoke of your concerns about recent attacks on the judiciary. I look forward to working together to ensure accurate commentary on the judiciary and the justice system.

You have also said to me that your style is to listen. In you I believe that we have a Lord Chancellor who will not only listen but will, engage, discuss, reflect. And then be decisive. You are a Lord Chancellor who wants to visit the courts and tribunals, who wishes to engage with the judges and the staff and the legal professions, to see things first hand and understand the realities of the justice system today in order to make them better for the future.

Your oath today reinforces the importance of and your role in upholding our constitutional principles. It is no exaggeration to say that the oath you take today is in reality one to secure the health and vitality of our democracy. It will not always be easy. It will, sometimes, require you to make difficult decisions. And, it will, sometimes, require you to take unpopular decisions.

I have no doubt that you will rise to these challenges as you have to all those you have encountered in your distinguished career. I very much look forward to working with you in a constructive partnership as you meet those challenges, both of us working in our respective constitutional roles.

Today though is not a day for challenges. It is a day of celebration. A day of congratulation and best wishes. I offer our best wishes on behalf of the judiciary of England and Wales in the discharge of your constitutional responsibilities. In your service to justice. And in your service to the rule of law.

Madam Solicitor. It is likewise a pleasure to welcome you, your family and friends attending, including the Advocate General for Scotland. You studied law at St Catherine's College, Oxford before being called to the Bar by the Inner Temple in 2004. You specialised in employment law, particularly representing trade union members before setting up your own legal consultancy, which focused on assisting women, particularly mothers, on matters concerning maternity discrimination.

Politics was equally important to you from an early age; something that runs in the family as your sister might say with a wry smile. From chairing Oxford University's Labour Club to serving as National Chair of Labour, you were then elected to the Labour Party's National Executive Committee in 2006, going on to serve as its Vice-Chair in 2015. You were then first elected to Parliament in 2017 as MP for candidate for Lewisham West and Penge. Following changes introduced by the Boundary Review, following the last General Election you serve as MP for Lewisham West and East Dulwich.

Both in Opposition and in Government you have held important offices. You have served as the Labour Party's Deputy National Campaign Coordinator and having previously been the Vice-Chair of the Labour Party and Shadow Minister for Prisons and Probation. Following the last General Election you were appointed its Chair and a Minister without Portfolio, in which capacity you attended the Cabinet. Your current office is one with

which you are not simply qualified by your legal experience. It is one with which you have direct experience having served as Shadow Solicitor General from 2020-2021.

Madam Solicitor, on behalf of the judiciary of England and Wales may I also congratulate you on your appointment and wish you well in the discharge of your constitutional responsibilities. As with our new Lord Chancellor we look forward to building a strong partnership with you, within the bounds of our different constitutional roles, to better secure justice and the rule of law.