

Office of the
Prime Minister



Cabinet du
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Regina, Saskatchewan

Denise, members of the Batters family, ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered together today to remember Dave, to lament his passing, and to comfort each other.

Dave held a place in all our hearts. To his wife and family, he was a loving and beloved husband, son and brother. To his friends, he was unfailingly loyal, generous and caring. And among his colleagues in Parliament, myself included, he was greatly admired for his dedication to his constituents, our party, and our country.

In my experience, no one, on either side of the aisle ever had a bad word to say about Dave. His passion for the causes he embraced was combined with respect for his opponents. Dave was always excited about whatever issue or initiative he was working on. His energy and enthusiasm were infectious. He had a good sense of humour. He lifted spirits and inspired others. In fact, I used to tell my staff that I wished *I* could match Dave Batters' liveliness and optimism.

However, some months before his political career ended I became aware that beneath this veneer of optimism Dave struggled with severe anxiety and depression. And in the end Dave lost the fight against his illness. While we

cannot understand why a loved one would act with such sudden finality, we need to know that Dave is not alone. Each year, nearly 4,000 Canadians make this same choice. Mostly, the experts tell us, it is a decision to end their burden of depression. Fighting their illness, their minds drawing them ever further inward they have grown weary of life.

However, this we know: in his struggle Dave achieved a life worth living, a simple but profound truth, a goal we all aspire to, and he reached it. Dave's family can take great pride in this. For Dave made a significant contribution to the lives of others. Another great goal in life, and one he achieved so ably. When he ran for public office, Dave did not do so for selfish reasons. He responded to the tragedy of another, the murder of his friend Michelle. He heard, and answered a call to service and he did so with conviction, distinction and success. Depression didn't stop that. It was his decency that drove him forward, that defined him in life, that will define him in death.

Dave was a very human politician. He opened himself to others. It strengthened his hand in representing his constituents, but it rendered him vulnerable to depression as it can to any of us. Dave was an idealist but he was also a realist. When he decided not to offer again for re-election, he made the right choice: to re-build his health. And he spoke openly about his illness. In doing so, he performed a great public service.

We need to know that mental illness like Dave's is shockingly common in our society. It affects the great and the small alike despite the stigma that still too often surrounds it. Other politicians have carried the same burden. In fact, perhaps the two greatest English-speaking politicians in history, Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill struggled with depression. And one of Canada's most admired and successful statesmen, Ontario premier John Robarts served the country with great distinction before finally succumbing to his illness.

Dave's friends in caucus gave him their support. I encourage them to reach out to other colleagues. Parliament is a human institution, and depression is a human experience, none of us are exempt.

The science has progressed but we still don't know enough about depression, and less about suicide. But we know this much:

depression can strike the sturdiest of souls. It cares not how much you have achieved nor how much you have to live for. Severe anxiety and depression are concentrated among men and women in their primary working years, and, most sadly, in their adolescent children. Unlike its myth, depression is not a function of character except that to fight it summons a strength of character and a great strength of character like Dave's to fight it as long as he did. Dave dealt with his illness head-on. That takes courage.

To Dave's family, we mourn and share your loss. But so too do we share your pride in Dave's life and in the greater good he served through elected office and through his public battle with depression from which we can all learn. For this, we honour his memory and celebrate his life.

In Dave's name, to all Canadians who struggle with depression and to all families who have lost loved ones to depression and suicide, I say that you are not alone. And I commend Dave's legacy of distinction, courage and resolve both in Parliament and in life.