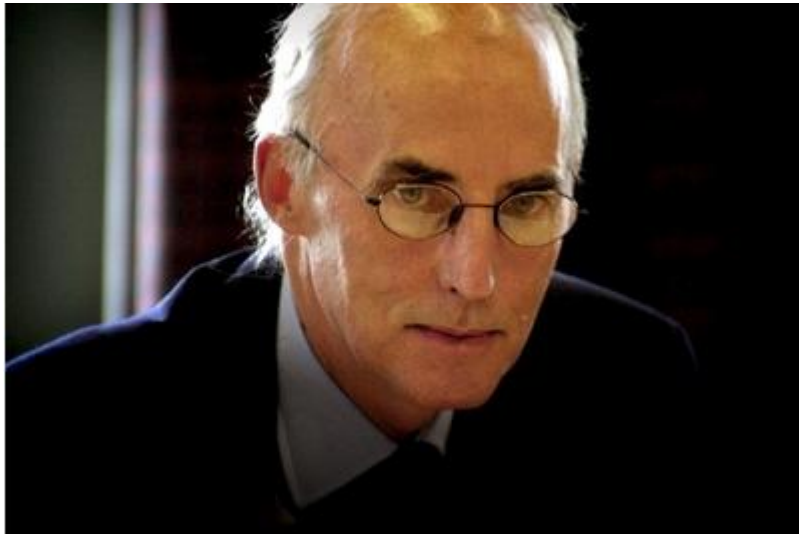


Dr Sam Galbraith

Neurosurgeon and politician

Born: October 18, 1945;

Died: August 18, 2014



Sam Galbraith, who has died aged 68, was one of a small band of politicians who bridged the gap between the "old" and "new" Scotland. Having begun his political career as an MP at Westminster, Galbraith ended it as a founding member of the Scottish Parliament.

He was also that rare creature, a politician almost devoid of ambition. Although he was perhaps the world's longest-surviving lung transplant patient, in 1990 Galbraith had been given just two years to live and as a result was not only straightforward in his political dealings, but often alarmingly frank in pointing out uncomfortable home truths to his colleagues.

"I wasn't really supposed to have this extra time," he reflected in 2007, "I was supposed to die." But as a result of that "bizarre situation", Galbraith lived "each day the best I can, without anticipating that I'll wake up again the next morning".

Samuel Laird Galbraith was born on October 18, 1945 in Clitheroe, Lancashire, the son of Sam Galbraith, a joiner-turned-teacher, and his wife Cathie. He grew up on a housing estate in Greenock and was educated at the town's High School (as a child he was an avid

mountaineer and Boy Scout) and the University of Glasgow, from which he received an honours degree in medicine in 1968.

Galbraith then studied for a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, which he received in 1971, becoming a Doctor of Medicine (MD) six years later. Until his election to Parliament Galbraith worked as a consultant neurosurgeon at Greater Glasgow Health Board. In 1983 he published *An Introduction to Neurosurgery*.

At the 1987 General Election Galbraith swapped the operating theatre for the opposition benches in the House of Commons after winning the apparently safe Conservative seat of Strathkelvin and Bearsden from the incumbent Tory MP Michael Hirst, a contemporary from the Glasgow University Union.

His maiden speech focused on health, the NHS being the largest single employer in his constituency, although he jokingly warned the House to be wary of "so-called experts" such as him who tended to "peddle our prejudices and ride our hobby horses". In 1988 he was appointed Labour spokesman on Scottish affairs and health.

Health also proved a more personal concern. A keen runner and climber, Galbraith was diagnosed with fibrosing alveolitis, which caused a stiffening and hardening of the lungs, following a trip to the Himalayas in 1987.

By November 1989 Galbraith's condition was grave, and he even accepted in an interview with the *Glasgow Herald* that he would die if a donor could not be found. In January 1990, Galbraith was taken by air ambulance to Newcastle's Freeman Hospital, the only one in Europe equipped to carry out the procedure. Although the operation (only the 13th carried out in the UK) was a success, he was given just two years to live. Galbraith, whose older sister Kathleen had died following a transplant for the same condition, feared he would not live to see his five-month-old daughter Mhairi grow up.

There were, of course, complications after the transplant. Galbraith had to take a cocktail of tablets and, although the side-effects later disappeared, it was both painful and life-altering. He lost five stones and all his energy, although his wife Nicola encouraged him to eat and exercise.

Not only did Galbraith survive, he also went on to have two more daughters, Heather and Fiona. Once back at work, he also flourished politically, becoming Labour's spokesman on employment after the 1992 General Election, and a junior minister at the Scottish Office following Tony Blair's landslide victory at the General Election of 1997.

In 1999, Galbraith stood for the Scottish Parliament in the same constituency, becoming Minister for Children and Education, a brief which also included his favourite responsibility, the arts. In 2000 he was at the centre of a crisis involving the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), when it distributed inaccurate or incomplete exam results to more than 5,000 pupils.

The SNP and Scottish Conservatives called for Galbraith to resign, claiming he and the SQA had "deliberately misled people". But he refused, saying: "The easiest thing for me is to walk away. The difficult thing is to stay and resolve this. That's what I'm doing." He added that his position as a minister was "irrelevant".

When Henry McLeish became First Minister in November 2000 Galbraith was moved to the Environment portfolio, although by March the following year he had announced his intention to retire from both the Scottish and UK Parliaments at the 2001 General Election. "I've been very lucky," he told The Herald. "Now I need to protect my health."

In retirement Galbraith kept himself busy with work for the General Medical Council's disciplinary body, handling tribunals and industrial injuries. Apart from six-monthly health checks he led a reasonably active life, playing golf ("atrociously", by his own admission), learning the violin and teaching first-year anatomy and medicine at Glasgow University.

Above all he was content at having enjoyed "two successful careers, one as a neurosurgeon and the other as a politician". Galbraith's political interventions were sometimes perceived as arrogant, when in fact he was just being honest. "Politics is plagued by a lot of self-opinionated people who are self-styled experts in some subject," he said in 2007, "when in fact they have no grasp of it whatsoever."

He is survived by his wife Nicola and three daughters.