

19 YEARS IN POLITICS:

From an Ophthalmologist

To move from the realm of medicine to the domain of politics may not be a common path, yet both fields are grounded in the same love and commitment to serve our fellow man. We invite Dr Lim Wee Kiak to share his thoughts as one who has travelled these two paths, serving the nation through action and policy alike.

Text and photos by Dr Lim Wee Kiak

I was an “accidental” politician. With the intention of improving the estate my family lived in, I started volunteering and serving in the Marsiling Zone 8 Resident’s Committee in 1998 after my Master of Medicine (Ophthalmology) examination. This initial step led me to subsequently serve in Fuchun Community Club, Sembawang Town Council, Northwest Community Development Council and Marsiling Secondary School over a period of eight years. Through these experiences, I made many friends from different walks of life and gained a better understanding of our community and various government policies.

In 2004, after returning to Singapore from my one-year Health Manpower Development Plan (HMDP) fellowship at the National Eye Institute, National Institutes of Health, USA, I was invited by then Marsiling Member of Parliament (MP), Mr Hawazi Daipi, to attend tea sessions organised as policy feedback sessions. I was later asked to participate in the General Elections in 2006. With much hesitation and trepidation, I agreed and thus began my journey in politics.

Improving lives

Balancing my responsibilities as an MP and a consultant at Singapore National Eye Centre was challenging. In 2007, after completing my HMDP bond, I decided to go into private practice, which provided me with the flexibility to better care for both my constituents and my patients.

As clinicians, we are accustomed to running clinics. As MPs, we run weekly Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS), which are akin to social clinics. We listen to our residents, analyse and diagnose their problems, and prescribe solutions through appeal letters to relevant government agencies. Like in medicine, we cannot cure all our patients, but we can alleviate their symptoms and always offer comfort and a listening ear. Most MPS cases are simple and straightforward, but there are challenging ones that we escalate to ministers and Parliament. Constituency work is very meaningful, and I have had the privilege of sharing the joys and tears of the residents in Sembawang, watching an entire generation grow up over the last 19 years.

During my medical student days, I enjoyed playing the city-building video game SimCity to relieve study pressure. Managing the town council and being actively involved in Sembawang town development over the last two decades has been like a real-life SimCity in action. From a young and small town with limited amenities, Sembawang town today features a new community hub, Bukit Canberra, replete with an indoor sports hall containing 18 badminton courts, an 800-seat hawker centre, Sembawang Polyclinic, the largest indoor ActiveSG gym in Singapore, a public swimming pool with outdoor and sheltered pools, a large outdoor gym, and therapeutic gardens. I have had the honour and privilege of witnessing the phenomenal growth of Sembawang town, including the Sembawang Hot Spring Park.

I am also blessed to have been part of a private practice group, as I was able to rely on my colleagues to look after my patients when I am occupied with MP work. Managing both roles effectively would be impossible if I were in solo practice.





In medicine, we treat one patient at a time, as each patient is unique and deserves our full attention. Our work as doctors is very specific to our patients. In politics, as MPs, we legislate laws that formulate policies affecting millions of Singaporeans, both present and future generations. I am very glad and privileged to have had the opportunity to help shape policies to improve the lives of Singaporeans.

As a politician, I also played a role in promoting Singapore's interests at regional and international parliamentary meetings. Unlike international medical conferences, these meetings involve representing Singapore and making friends with fellow parliamentarians to lobby for their support for Singapore.

A fulfilling journey

The last 27 years (serving as a grassroots volunteer and later as an MP) have passed quickly, as each day was exciting

and meaningful. I am most blessed to have a supportive spouse who has raised our three children mostly by herself, as my political and clinical work occupied all my weekdays and nights. Even weekends were filled with grassroots events and other community engagements, including religious groups and clan associations. I am also fortunate to have worked alongside passionate grassroots leaders and branch activists. They are all volunteers who generously contribute their time and resources to improve the lives of others in the community.

I find more similarities than differences between being a politician and an ophthalmologist. Both strive to make our patients' and residents' lives better. As an ophthalmologist, I have helped many patients see better and clearer. As a politician, I hope I have helped Parliament see with crystal clarity as we debated bills and issues in the House. ♦

Legend

1. Floor party with Canberra residents
2. Last block visit during General Elections 2025

Dr Lim, 57, is an ophthalmologist at Eagle Eye Centre. He served four terms (19 years) as a Member of Parliament serving the division of Canberra in Sembawang GRC.

