

## **FULL NICK HERBERT STATEMENT ON FAIR SEATS**

“I'm a strong supporter of first-past-the-post. No other electoral system provides the valuable constituency link which is so important to how people relate to their MP and how constituents judge the effectiveness of our parliamentary democracy. I don't think a move to proportional representation would make people more engaged with politics or improve turnout - in fact it could compound some of the problems.

Falling turnout is common across all Western countries and has deeper roots than any perceived inadequacies of the voting mechanism. Besides, the tendency for proportional representation to cement centrist coalitions in power actually risks making people feel even more detached from politics. The process of forming a Government should never be a back-room affair and being able to kick politicians out of office and see them swiftly replaced is a vital weapon for a disillusioned public. Seeing politicians squabble for months without agreement, like in Belgium, is not good for democracy.

A preoccupation with changing the electoral system totally misses the point about the causes of voter disengagement. The right constitutional reforms are about returning power to individuals and local communities.

### **Boundaries**

Ideally electoral boundaries would stay as closely linked to established county or district borders as possible, but population growth often makes this impossible. On balance, it's more important that MPs represent roughly the same size of population than we remain wedded to old boundaries that allow population disparities to grow widely.

### **Reviews**

I think boundary reviews should be conducted more frequently to take account of population changes, and they should use more up-to-date data. Last year, the academics Colin Rawlings and Michael Thrasher calculated that the current boundaries worked to the advantage of the Labour Party to such an extent that at the 2005 election, Conservatives were denied 12 extra seats.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life has criticised unnecessary delays in the review process and has called for a reappraisal of the rules governing the review of parliamentary boundaries. Ignoring the independent and expert calls for new rules on parliamentary boundaries is unacceptable. It's similar to Labour's unwillingness to protect the integrity of the ballot by introducing individual voter registration, despite the fact that this has been used successfully in Northern Ireland. Inaction on these issues is yet another example of Labour's willingness to allow distortion of the electoral system

for their partisan ends. It cannot be allowed to continue.”

## **FULL OLIVER HEALD STATEMENT ON FAIR SEATS**

“It’s time we had fair votes in the UK - and no – I don’t mean Proportional Representation!! Votes in different parts of the UK have different values due to the wide variations in the size of constituencies. This strikes at the heart of the democratic principle of equal voting rights for citizens. We should end the disparities by introducing a fixed electoral quota – the electorate divided by the number of seats – with only a small margin to avoid splitting council wards.

Currently the Boundary Commission chooses not to cross county boundaries and uses old electoral data in making its final recommendations. This creates an urban bias in the system and fails to take adequate account of net migration from the cities. We should change the Regulations to put maintaining an equal quota as the rule with priority over other considerations.

At the last General Election, the average Labour held seat had 6000 less voters than the average seat won by Conservatives. Electoral experts Thrasher and Rallings have highlighted this imbalance “Since 1997 Labour has enjoyed a large bonus from the electoral system... Electorates in constituencies where Labour is strong are smaller... it takes fewer votes to elect a Labour MP.”

I believe that each vote in our democracy should count equally. Many commentators agree and last January the Committee on Standards in Public Life, *Review of the Electoral Commission* pp.46-47 pointed to this issue and called for change.

“Recommendation: There is strong case for the current legislation in relation to the conduct of parliamentary boundary work to be reviewed... The review should, in particular consider: • addressing the progressive inequality of electoral quotas, and increase in the size of the House of Commons that appear inbuilt to the operation of the current rules; • the time taken to conduct reviews, particularly in England where, in addition to changes to the procedures, the possibility of carrying out inquiries on a regional basis should be considered”

But a year later nothing has been done as Labour puts its electoral interests ahead of protecting our democracy.”