



Bolton

13 May 2009

Dear Secretary of the Kelly Committee on MPs' expenses

I do not share the current consensus view on politicians. A lot of their permanent unpopularity is due to evasiveness. But that is the result of party solidarity. The public would dislike it if every MP gave his true opinion on every subject. They would not know what they were voting for.

There is also a short-term problem with accommodation. On housing allowances, as someone who commuted 200 miles every week I also understand the strain of living in two places. Few other members of the public can be expected to do so. Your task is difficult because travel needs from south of Watford are different from those in Scotland.

Nevertheless I venture to propose a simple solution:

Each candidate should state on his/her nomination paper the annual sum that he would claim for all purposes - salary and expenses. The successful candidate would get this sum of money and keep as much for himself as he wanted. No rules, no receipts, no messing about. Every incentive to live as cheaply as possible.

The only apparent disadvantage might be that well-funded groups or wealthy individuals might try to buy their way into parliament by submitting low bids. But would people really vote to save £100,000 a year per constituency if it meant the danger of closing hospitals, joining the euro etc? The expense claim would be a tangible but not crucial part of the election campaign.

I think that over time a consensus would emerge. Candidates of all parties would claim maybe £200,000 for a London constituency and £300,000 for country constituencies to cover themselves and five or six staff.

I see the disadvantages as follows: first it is too simple. Bureaucrats who have daily experience of complex systems dislike the idea of simplification as this puts casual users of the system at less of a disadvantage. Secondly the public mood is inauspicious. At the moment venting anger is more important than constructive planning. This is hardly the time to suggest that MPs should set their own salary. However, your remit is not 2009 but the next couple of decades. Thirdly MPs would have to vote to subject themselves to a system which exerted downwards pressure on the resources available to them.

Some minor rules will be necessary. A seat with a huge majority may tempt a huge cash claim from a candidate who regards herself as a certain winner. It will not be beyond the wit of your committee to devise a solution to such dangers. For example no MP should receive more than the fiftieth highest claim: the most expensive 50 MPs would all receive the same - that is the amount claimed by the 50th most expensive.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature, possibly 'G.', in cursive script.