

ANDREW ROBATHAN, M.P.



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17 MAR 2005

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

15<sup>th</sup> March 2006

*Dear Sir,*

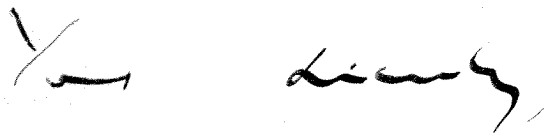

You wrote to me on 15<sup>th</sup> February about your review of the Electoral Commission. Although the paper asks several questions, I would like to make a general point linked to a little experience of the last few years.

My concern is that the democratic process is being undermined because of the lack of integrity of the electoral roll. First, the registration is not checked. Colleagues of mine have pointed out in the past that foreigners with no entitlement to vote are often registered and do vote. There is no checking of who is entitled to vote in particular elections – for instance, I was sent more than one postal vote in the European Elections because I am registered both in London and in Leicestershire; I could have voted in both places and as I understand it there is no spot or other check on whether I have done. Furthermore, there seems to be insufficient concern in the Commission to rectify this issue and to have what I would suggest, which would be spot checks through the electoral roll. At the moment, I understand that Electoral Registration Officers are discouraged from checking.

Second, I pursued for some time during the six months leading up to the General Election last year, the issue of service voter registration. The lack of registration was a scandal and I suggest that, at best, fewer than half service personnel were registered to vote and anecdotally, it may have been many fewer than that. When I spoke to a group of soldiers in Iraq last January, only one in five was registered. Whilst the Electoral Commission was sympathetic and indeed I met Sam Younger in October last year to discuss the matter with him, it seemed to me that there was insufficient urgency before the General Election from the Government and also from the Electoral Commission, who did nothing to rectify the position before May.

From these two points comes my central submission which is that the Electoral Commission should concentrate on getting the current system right and working before fiddling around with online voting or voting in shopping centres. The integrity of the electoral roll lies at the heart of democratic legitimacy. I have heard Government Ministers criticise the method of individual voter registration in Northern Ireland, because it reduced the number of people on the electoral roll. It seems to me that there is a great deal to be said for individual voter registration and I was amazed that Ministers had never heard of "vote early, vote often", which I understand to be a tongue in cheek comment on voting in Northern Ireland.

It is not unreasonable to expect responsible citizens in a democratic society to take the trouble to cast a vote once every couple of years and it is perfectly easy to do just that at the moment. Voting scandals like those involving postal votes two years ago have undermined faith in the system and I believe that the integrity of the electoral roll is also being questioned. Therefore, I hope you might direct that the Electoral Commission spends more time making the current system entirely reliable rather than thinking of novel ways to encourage people to vote.

Sir Alistair Graham  
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