SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM BILL

HARRY HAYFIELD

I am a resident of the county of Ceredigion in Wales and hope that committee will accept a submission from a fellow Celt, if not a Scottish citizen. My submission is concerned about the oversight of the counting procedure for the referendum and covers three aspects:

1) Democratic Oversight
2) Media Reporting
3) Electorate Awareness

Firstly, Democratic Oversight. I am pleased that the bill published yesterday allows for observers registered with the Electoral Commission to watch the count as it is being held but am a little concerned that there does not appear to be enough recognition that international observers, some of whom may come from areas also interested in holding referenda on independence, would be welcome to come. Therefore I would like to see a recommendation from the Committee that the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the European Commission are given as many chances to recruit and send observers to the count.

Secondly, Media Reporting. The Referendum announcement on March 21st 2013 was a very important day for Scotland and yet, if it had not been for my ability to get Scottish television via Sky Television, I would not have been able to see the announcement live. I would therefore like the committee to recommend that the broadcast of the count is shown live on both Sky News and BBC News and that any other international news channel that wishes to show the count live is given access to do so.

Thirdly, Electorate Awareness. The last time a referendum was held in Scotland, to establish the Scottish Parliament in 1997, the count was held overnight and although most people were aware of the result, that was the following day following the formal announcement of the result of the vote in the Highland council area. This referendum is even more important than that referendum, therefore I would like the committee to recommend that after the close of polls, the ballot boxes are taken to the local count centres (as outlined in the bill) and then placed under a secure guard so that the count can start at 9.00am the following day (so that the maximum number of people in Scotland can see the result being announced and be aware of the overall result).

I would dearly love to attend a session of the committee in case members had any questions they wished to raise about my suggestions, however the cost of getting from Ceredigion to Edinburgh is very prohibitive (and at this precise moment I am suffering from a painful hip joint), however if it is possible, I would be able to attend using video conferencing software (such as Skype) from my home.

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