

SCECLB231 George Weston

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Biliau Diwygio | Reform Bill Committee

Bil Senedd Cymru (Rhestrau Ymgeiswyr Etholiadol) | Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill

Ymateb gan George Weston | Evidence from George Weston

What are your views on the general principles of the Bill and the need for legislation to deliver the Welsh Government's stated policy objective (to make the Senedd a more effective legislature by ensuring it is broadly representative of the gender make-up of the population)?

The gender-manipulation proposals smack of what used to be known as "affirmative action" in the USA and which were found to be illegal in the UK. The insistence that all registered political parties achieve an exact gender-balance in their candidate lists presupposes that there are sufficient numbers of suitable candidates in each constituency of each gender whom that party wishes to sponsor - which may well be not the case. Selection of candidates should be gender-blind and the sole choice of the political party concerned.

What are your views on the system of enforcement and potential sanctions for non-compliance proposed in the Bill?

This proposed enforcement procedure is draconian, intrusive and unnecessary. I refer to my earlier statement on gender-blindness.

Are there any potential barriers to the implementation of the Bill's provisions? If so, what are they, and are they adequately taken into account in the Bill and the accompanying Explanatory Memorandum and Regulatory Impact Assessment?

Probable confusion amongst voters, who are used to, generally speaking, voting for a particular candidate in all other elections. The existing D'Hondt system is already somewhat confusing, in that a major voters' right - to vote for a person or persons - is already partially removed by the regional party lists, where, for instance, a voter may wish to vote for a particular person on their regional list but not anyone else on that list.

The days when people unthinkingly voted for a party, despite the perceived suitability of its local candidate(s), are thankfully diminishing. This proposal seems not to recognise this trend and serves to restrict voters' rights even further than at present.

Are any unintended consequences likely to arise from the Bill?

Yes, certainly in my case. I always vote in every election, local, general, whatever. If I am forced to vote for a party rather than an individual, the likelihood of my not bothering to vote at all will be much greater.

What are your views on the Welsh Government's assessment of the financial and other impacts of the Bill?

Neutral

What are your views on the balance between the information contained on the face of the Bill and what is left to subordinate legislation? Are the powers for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation appropriate?

I am not qualified to give a sensible answer to this question.

Do you have any views on matters relating to the legislative competence of the Senedd including compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights?

No

Do you have any views on matters related to the quality of the legislation, or to the constitutional or other implications of the Bill?

Only those two fundamental views that I have expressed earlier in this consultation, i.e. the proposals relating to gender-balance and party-lists.

Are there any other issues that you would like to raise about the Bill and the accompanying Explanatory Memorandum or any related matters?

Yes. My concern is the lack of advance publicity about what these proposals will mean to the average voter, if the bill is passed. This may well result in an unwelcome fait accompli, with the general public having being unaware of these changes until it is too late. I was only made aware of this consultation by an email from my local community council on 26th March, which drew attention to the very short time scale for reading, understanding, formulating a view and then accessing the survey and returning it, all before 12th April. I could be wrong but this smacks to me of trying to

bulldoze this through without receiving thousands of objections. Being retired, I have had a couple of days to go through all this. I fear that the average working person may not have such spare time - or even the inclination to plough through all this and understand it in the very short time scale allowed.

Anything else?

No